



Safety Information 005/20

Safe use of disposable (single patient use) slings

Situation

An incident was reported where a harness clip strap of a disposable sling snapped while a patient was being transferred in a mechanical lifter. Identified contributing factors included the that the process for monitoring the usage and frequency of the disposable sling was not clear. This may increase the risk that a disposable sling could be used more frequently than indicated in the manufacturer's instructions for use (IFU), and sling breakage during patient use.

Background

Slings are used with a mechanical lifter or ceiling hoist system, to lift or transfer patients with reduced mobility. Disposable slings are commonly used for infectious or frequently hoisted patients.

Like all medical devices, disposable slings are to be used in accordance with the manufacturer's IFU. In this incident, the manufacturer's IFU indicated that the maximum use period of the sling was two weeks, based on four transfers per day (a maximum total of 56 lifts). Different brands of disposable slings have different IFUs.

Assessment

An investigation of all disposable slings on state contract found that different brands of disposable slings stipulate different requirements for safe use. While manufacturer's do not always state a "maximum use period", they do state that disposable slings are:

- For single patient use only
- To be replaced if they get wet or soiled
- Not be washed
- To be inspected prior to each use
- Not to be used on patients who exceed the stated safe working load.

To standardise practice and align with most commonly defined period of use in IFUs, the maximum use period for disposable slings should be no more than two weeks, provided that the sling is in good working order prior to each use.

Clinical Recommendations

- Prior to use, inspect the sling and clips for signs of damage (i.e. fraying, tearing, cracking, bending or breaks). Do not use if any signs of damage are present, or if you have doubts about its safety
- Ensure patient weight is within sling safe working load
- Services with patients who may require use of lifters for periods exceeding two weeks should consider reusable slings (if sling cleaning process available)
- Support staff awareness in correct assessment and selection for reusable or disposable slings
- Where possible, to assist with monitoring time in use, label disposable slings with patient's name and expiry date
- Slings are to be managed and stored in accordance with local infection prevention and control guidelines between use.

Suggested actions by Local Health Districts/Networks

1. Forward information to appropriate area for action
2. Ensure a system is in place to document actions taken
3. Report any ongoing concerns via the incident management system and escalate to management.

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Distributed to:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance
- Director Regulation & Compliance Unit

Expert Reference Group

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