

Hospital to put codes on surgical sponges

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Loyola Medical Center in Chicago is putting bar codes on surgical sponges to make sure they aren't left inside a patient after an operation is over.

U.S. medical studies show that 1,500 people each year have surgical objects accidentally left inside them after surgery, the hospital said Friday in a release.

Surgical sponges left inside the patient can cause pain, infection, bowel obstructions, additional surgeries and even death.

"When there is significant bleeding and a sponge is placed in a patient, it can sometimes look indistinguishable from the tissue around it," said Dr. Steven DeJong.

Each sponge has a unique bar code affixed to it that is scanned by a high-tech device to obtain a count. Before a procedure begins, the identification number of the patient and the badge of the surgical team member maintaining the count are scanned into the counter.

As an added safety feature, the bar code is heat sealed into the sponge to eliminate any danger of it becoming detached during a procedure, the hospital said.

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