



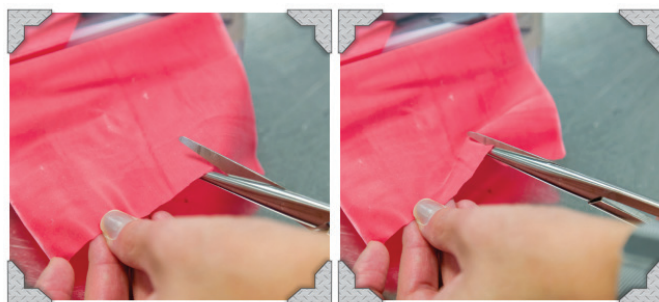
8 Critical Factors for Quality Surgical Instrument Repair



BY RICK SCHULTZ

Maintenance and repair of surgical instruments is vital for the devices' safe and proper function and also for extending instrument life and preventing premature replacement. Not all repair companies and contracts are the same, however. Consider the following to ensure your repair partners are meeting your needs most effectively.

1. Familiarize yourself with the contract details – It is essential to have a complete understanding of the contract. Know how many repair technicians will be available per visit and the repair costs for individual instruments. Additionally, it is prudent to ensure vendors share their sharpness testing standards. (See **Figure 1**)



Proper scissor sharpness testing

Proper testing of front 1/3 of scissor

Figure 1: Correct testing of sharp devices is essential for proper functionality.

2. Be knowledgeable of the repair contract pricing – The repair contract should publish repair prices for on-location repairs as well as instruments taken offsite. *Note: These prices should be identical.*
3. Tour the repair vehicle unannounced – Inspect the vehicle's exterior and interior, looking for cleanliness and safety features. Is it an appropriate medical device service vehicle, or is it rusty, dirty and unsafe looking? Also, check

the interior of the vehicle for fire extinguishers, carbon monoxide detectors and first-aid kit.

4. Verify the number of technicians onsite – Does the repair vendor send two or more technicians to your location and are they always the same technicians? This is a factor because having consistent technicians raises productivity and work quality. It is also important to know the technicians' training backgrounds. All technicians should have at least one year of experience. Less-experienced technicians typically send more instruments offsite or mark more devices as unrepairable.

Single Technician	Service	Multiple Technicians
No time to complete	Free instrument inspection	Yes
No time to complete	Complicated/specialty repairs	Yes
No time to complete	Remove/reapply color coding tape	Yes
No time to complete	In-service training	Yes
No time to complete	Complete all trays in a surgical service	Yes
No time to complete	Value-added services	Yes
5 needle holders/hr., 40 in 8 hrs.	Needle holder re-jawing*	15 needle holders/hr., 120 in 8 hrs.
10 scissors/hr.	Scissor sharpening **	30 scissors/hr.

***All tungsten carbide needle holders need re-jawing.**
****All scissors need sharpening.**

Figure 2: Services with single versus multiple repair technicians

5. Beware of low onsite repair prices – This can be an indicator that the repair team will make up for low prices by sending instruments offsite and then billing at a higher rate. (As noted previously, onsite and offsite repairs should be billed at the same rate.) The instruments most in need of repair are scissors and needle holders. Be sure to know and verify the repair price for each instrument. All scissors



Types of needle holders and tread wear on a tungsten carbide jaw

Mayo Scissors



Figure 3

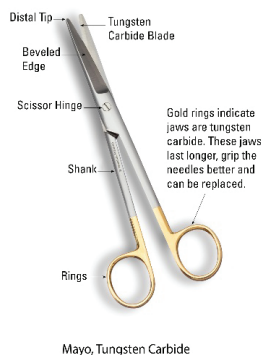


Figure 4

Types of Needle Holders

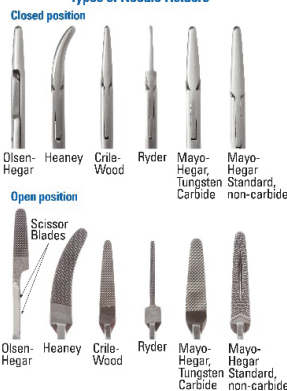


Figure 5

Heaney Needle Holder, Tungsten Carbide Jaws

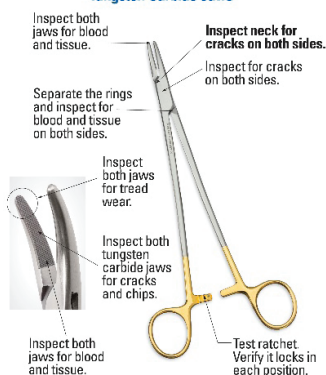


Figure 6



Figure 7

should be sharpened onsite/on location. This includes standard, tungsten carbide (gold rings), micro, super cut (black-handled) and spring-handled scissors. All needle holders should be re-jawed on location and gold-handled needle holders repaired on location, not sent offsite.

6. Review the instruments covered under the capitated agreement – In a capitated contract, the facility agrees to pay a monthly flat fee to the repair vendor for the month’s service provided. If your contract is a capitated agreement, the entire Sterile Processing staff should know which instruments are covered under the agreement. Typically, these agreements are high-dollar and include surgical and laparoscopic instruments, rigid and flexible endoscopes, and power equipment. The most important factor is for staff to know what is not covered and ensure repair vendors have priced these exclusions properly. *Note: Buyer beware, these types of agreements favor the repair vendor. The key to this agreement is knowing the items you are being charged for that are not in the agreement.*

7. Beware “daily rate” contracts – It is essential to understand which surgical services are not covered and be extremely aware of the number of instruments being taken offsite. A repair vendor can charge a higher price or additional fee for instruments serviced offsite. Services typically not included in this daily rate include:

- Complete instrument refurbishing
- Color tape removal and reapplication
- Providing reorder numbers for non-repairable instruments
- Full tray inspection, testing, refurbishing and repair
- Tungsten carbide jaw replacement for needle holders (see **Figures 6 and 7**)
- Laparoscopic instrument and insulation repair
- Diamond dust needle holder repair/resurfacing, plus complex instruments not serviced
- Demagnetizing instruments
- Offsite repairs – The primary reason these items are usually not included in a low-priced daily rate is that including them is not profitable for the repair vendor. Remember, the customer may be paying less for this type of repair vendor but is receiving far fewer services.

8. Ensure the tracking system is based on tray usage, not time – This is the best utilization of a tracking system. Tracking this way directs repair vendors to the most-used trays, which are the ones that will be most in need of repair and sharpening. The repair vendor must track repair history for all instrument sets in the inventory. If not, the vendor may only pull the least-used sets because they are available. The repair vendor should make recommendations regarding which sets are due for service and schedule accordingly with the customer.



Q : Our repair vendor has a long, bushy beard, and we are concerned about hair getting in our trays. I know the trays go through decontamination, but we are still concerned. Any advice?

A : Share your concerns with your repair company's management. Also, be sure to follow your department's hair-covering policy (which includes head and facial hair) and advise the repair technicians of this policy. ▶



RICK SCHULTZ, the Instrument Whisperer™, is an author, inventor, lecturer, and the retired Chief Executive Officer of Spectrum Surgical Instruments Corp. He served as contributing editor of HSPA's *Central Service Technical Manual* (fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth editions). Schultz authored the textbooks *Inspecting Surgical Instruments: An Illustrated Guide* and *The World of Surgical Instruments: The Definitive Inspection Textbook*, which was released in June 2018. In October 2021, Schultz published the veterinary medicine textbook *The World of Surgical Instruments for Animal Health*. Schultz was named HSPA's Educator of the Year in 2002 and the American Hospital Association Educator of the Year in 2006. In 2007, he was named by *Healthcare Purchasing News* as one of the 30 Most Influential People in Healthcare Sterile Processing. Schultz currently provides educational lectures to Sterile Processing professionals at HSPA's annual conferences and conducts Operating Room personnel lectures across the country.

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