



Editorial

Gossypiboma: The Unseen Menace Within Our Operating Rooms

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Introduction:

Gossypiboma, a textiloma or retained surgical sponge, is an uncommon but potentially catastrophic surgical error. It occurs when surgical sponges, gauze, or other textiles used during a procedure are unintentionally left inside a patient's body. Despite stringent protocols for counting surgical instruments before and after surgery, instances of Gossypiboma continue to occur, leading to dire consequences for patients and placing healthcare providers under a cloud of legal and ethical scrutiny.

The term "Gossypiboma" derives from "Gossypium" (the botanical genus of cotton) and "boma" (Swahili for "place of concealment"), aptly describing the condition where a surgical sponge or textile is left behind, concealed within a patient's body following a surgical procedure. Though seemingly an anachronism in the modern surgical arena, Gossypiboma remains an infrequent yet perilous event that warrants ongoing vigilance and the development of effective preventive strategies.

The Magnitude of the Problem:

Accurate estimates of the incidence of Gossypiboma are elusive, primarily due to underreporting and reluctance on the part of healthcare providers to disclose such incidents.

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Nevertheless, research suggests that it occurs more frequently than acknowledged, with potentially catastrophic consequences. Gossypiboma can lead to severe complications such as infection, abscess formation, gastrointestinal obstruction, and even death. Moreover, it poses significant emotional distress to patients and healthcare providers alike and can result in costly litigation.

Patient Impact:

The consequences of Gossypiboma can be devastating. Patients who experience this complication may suffer from a wide range of symptoms, including pain, infection, abscess formation, bowel obstructions, and even sepsis. These complications can lead to prolonged hospital stays, additional surgeries, permanent organ damage, and in some unfortunate cases, death. Furthermore, patients who have undergone a surgical procedure often place their trust in the medical team to provide them with the best care possible, making Gossypiboma a breach of that trust.

Root Causes and Preventive Measures:

The occurrence of Gossypiboma can be attributed to multiple factors, including the fast-paced, high-stress environment of the operating room, inadequate communication among surgical team members, and lapses in established protocols for counting and tracking surgical instruments and

sponges. The "surgical count" is a critical element in preventing this phenomenon, but it is not foolproof, as human error remains a potential pitfall.

To mitigate the risk of Gossypiboma, hospitals and healthcare institutions must prioritize the implementation of advanced technologies, such as radiofrequency identification (RFID) systems and barcoding, to track surgical instruments and sponges. These technologies provide real-time feedback and reduce reliance on manual counts, significantly enhancing patient safety. Additionally, promoting a culture of open communication within surgical teams and adopting standardized protocols can aid in preventing this avoidable complication.

Legal and Ethical Implications:

Gossypiboma has legal and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored. Patients have the right to expect safe and error-free healthcare and healthcare providers bear a professional and moral obligation to deliver such care. When

Gossypiboma occurs, it often leads to medical malpractice claims, tarnishing the reputation of healthcare institutions and eroding trust in the medical profession. By addressing this issue proactively through preventive measures, healthcare providers can uphold their ethical duty to not harm.

Conclusion:

Gossypiboma remains a distressing complication that continues to affect patients and challenge healthcare providers. While no surgical procedure can be entirely risk-free, the prevention and early detection of Gossypiboma demand the utmost attention. Healthcare institutions must prioritize the implementation of standardized counting protocols, adopt advanced tracking technologies, and promote a culture of open communication and continuous improvement. By doing so, we can work together to ensure that Gossypiboma becomes a relic of the past, and patients can trust that their surgical journey will be free from this silent menace.