

Teaching Sutures

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It can be said that teaching sutures is one of the hardest aspects of surgical technology. It does not lend itself to easy memorization and the information is not easy to learn unless it can be seen in the working O.R. environment, yet students cannot be turned loose in the scrub role without a basic understanding. This paper will provide some ideas concerning how to teach sutures and how memorization can take place.

Categorize

Sutures should be broken down into their most basic elements to begin with. A good starting point is with the four different categories. These categories include absorbable, non-absorbable, natural, and synthetic. The students can then start to place each suture into one of these categories and start the memorization process. A couple of good learning tools recommended to students are flashcards, and scrapbooks.

Flashcards

The student can create flash cards. There are a couple of different types of flashcards that come in handy. One type of flash card has the different names of the suture material on each side. If it is an Ethicon product such as Vicryl® the reverse side could have the USSC name which would be Polysorb®, or if one of the clinical rotation sites has one brand but not the other, the chemical name such as Polygalactin 910 can be used.

A second type of flashcard can have a piece of the suture material on one side and the information on the other side. A third type can have the suture name and if it is absorbable, non-absorbable, synthetic, or natural.

Scrapbooks

Scrapbooks can be fun to make and educational. The student starts with a piece of the suture material, labels it, and writes down all the information needed about that particular suture. It can easily be placed in a three ring binder with plastic or tape over each piece of suture. They do not need 18 inches of suture, when a 1-2 inch piece is all that is needed for viewing and handling.

Tissue

Tissue should be the next subject of discussion after suture. Students need to realize that different tissues heal differently under different circumstances. This is where the information as related to absorbable and non-absorbable is important. Once they realize the differences in tissue, it is easier for them to recognize the need for one type of suture over the other.

Dr's Preference

Students should be told that sometimes it does not matter if a piece of material is natural or synthetic so much as Dr's preference takes precedence. This necessitates the student keeping a record of each doctor they work with and his/her personal preferences. Sometimes knowing how and where a doctor is trained will let the student know that not all things are one way or another.

Not all at once

Do not expect students to know everything about suture in 1 or 2 weeks. Some may do very well learning the basics, while others may not do as well. Much like learning surgical instruments, group the sutures together, for example 10 different sutures one week, another 10 the next week and so forth, to prevent the student from becoming overwhelmed at having to learn too much at once. One idea is to give the suture lecture within the first two weeks of the first semester, but

during the latter part of the semester arrange to have a suture representative as a guest lecturer.

This will help to reinforce the information presented in the prior lecture.