Importance of cleaning

One of the main responsibilities of veterinary nurses is to keep the veterinary clinic hygienically clean. Cleaning may seem very mundane but it is an essential cornerstone of aseptic technique. Since cleaning comprises a great deal of your responsibilities as veterinary nurse, this makes you a very valuable and important member of the veterinary hospital team.

Remember—things that are aesthetically clean or ‘clean to the eye’ may not necessarily be aseptically clean.

There are three main types of cleaning:

- removing gross contamination
- disinfectants and antiseptics
- sterilisation.

Removing gross contamination

Removal of obvious dirt and organic material is essential prior to treatment with many antiseptics and detergents in order increase their effectiveness. This can be done by:

- detergents—defatting agents—which remove grease and oils
- mechanical aids, such as mops and scrubbing brushes
- pest control—eg mouse traps and cockroach baits
- regular removing of rubbish from the site—eg by emptying bins so as to discourage the growth and multiplication of disease carrying vermin and micro-organisms.

Disinfectants and antiseptics

These chemicals remove and destroy most micro-organisms, except some viruses and heat-resistant bacteria and bacterial spores.

Disinfection reduces the possible number of contaminants. Disinfectants are chemicals that are normally too strong or irritating to be used on living tissue—eg bleach.
Antiseptics are usually milder types of disinfectants suitable for use on living tissue—eg chlorhexidine, dettol and iovone.

Antiseptics and disinfectants are used on and within the environment around the surgical site.

**Sterilisation**

This process destroys all micro-organisms, including bacterial spores.

This method of cleaning is used on items that will come in intimate contact with the surgical wound—surgical instruments, drapes, gloves.

**Methods of sterilisation**

The methods include:

- autoclaving—steam under pressure
- ionising radiation—gamma
- chemicals
- gases.

**Clean the operating theatre before you use it**

Cleaning of the theatre should be carried out at the beginning and the end of each day and between surgeries.

In line with the concept of asepsis, the utensils used for the cleaning of the operating theatre should only be used for that purpose. Cleaning equipment may include mops, buckets, brooms, containers of disinfectants, cleaning cloths and gloves.
After use, all buckets should be emptied and the mop rinsed and put out in the sun to dry. Some mop heads can be laundered in the washing machine. Mops should not be left sitting in buckets of filthy water as this makes an ideal breeding ground for infectious organisms and it also tends to cause the mop heads to rot.

There are many hazardous substances. Many of the chemicals come in a concentrated form, so it is important to:

- read the labels
- make up to the correct concentration.

Some chemicals may cause skin irritation or be toxic if they come in contact with your skin and others may also cause holes or stains on clothes.