High efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtered cabinets to dry and store flexible endoscopes

Issue
HEPA cabinets were being purchased with a view to using them as an alternative to the requirement of the GESA/GENCA guidelines that all flexible endoscopes be reprocessed before use, on the day of use.

Recommendations
Duodenoscopes and bronchoscopes must continue to be reprocessed before use according to the GESA/GENCA guidelines.

The storage life for gastroscopes and colonoscopes may be extended to 72 hours provided strict criteria are observed. This means that gastroscopes and colonoscopes do not have to be reprocessed before use, on the day of use, if they have been reprocessed within the last 72 hours, as long as:

1. The gastroscopes and colonoscopes are reprocessed strictly in accordance with GESA/GENCA guidelines. This must include a final alcohol flush followed by a meticulous drying process before storage.

2. The quality assurance processes recommended by GESA/GENCA are in place, particularly:
   - The rinse water is bacteria free and automated endoscope reproprocessors (AER) and post-filtered water are regularly monitored under a bacteriological surveillance system using cultures assessed in accredited pathology laboratories.
   - Bacteriological surveillance of endoscopes is carried out according to guidelines.
   - Evidence from the above surveillance indicates that the processes in place for cleaning, reprocessing and storing of endoscopes does not support growth of organisms in the channels.

3. The gastroscopes and colonoscopes are stored in either a:
   - Clean, dry, well ventilated, dedicated storage cupboard, which permits full length hanging on appropriate support structures; OR
   - Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approved, purpose built drying cabinet which provides continuous passage of HEPA filtered air through all channels and with quality mechanisms which alarm if airflow does not occur or the temperature of the perfused air falls outside of the operating parameters. UV lighting is not recommended.

4. There is a record available to subsequent users of the stored gastroscopes and colonoscopes indicating the date and time they were last reprocessed.

If it is not possible to meet the above criteria the storage life of gastroscopes and colonoscopes must not be extended and they should be reprocessed before use, on the day of use.

If it is possible to meet the above criteria, initial bacteriological testing must be performed on colonoscopes and gastroscopes after storage for 72 hours to confirm and document that existing scope care supports the extension of their storage life.

Principal Guideline
Cowen A, Jones D, Wardle E. Infection control in endoscopy 2nd ed. Sydney: Gastroenterological Society of Australia and Gastroenterological Nurses College of Australia; 2003

For additional information and other readings please visit http://www.health.qld.gov.au/chrisp/resources/advisories.asp

Suggested actions
1. Ensure all endoscopy reprocessing units strictly adhere to the GESA/GENCA reprocessing guidelines prior to extending storage life of gastroscopes and colonoscopes.
3. Direct all manufacturers and/or distributors to Health Services Purchasing & Logistics (HSP&L).