Infectious diseases linked to cross-contamination of flexible endoscopes

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Introduction
Flexible endoscopes are widely used to examine, diagnose and treat medical disorders. Despite the availability of international, national and local endoscope reprocessing guidelines, contamination and transmission of microorganisms continue to occur.

Objectives
This article presents an overview of publications in case reports and outbreaks related to contamination of flexible endoscopes.

Methods
The following search terms or combinations of terms were used to search in PubMed: endoscope, endoscope reprocessing, outbreak and infection. Studies were included if published in English from the year 2000 onwards.

Results
Thirty-two publications were included in this review. From these, eight incidents involved damaged or defective flexible endoscopes, eight were related to failures during manual endoscope reprocessing, eleven reports related to reprocessing failures where the disinfection step was carried out by an AER and five due to failure or malfunctioning of the AER.

Conclusion
To ensure quality reprocessing of flexible endoscopes, mandatory competency training and periodic auditing should take place. Early detection of contamination would be made easier if periodic microbiological testing were to be included in the guidelines. The guidelines need to include a standardized procedure, to ensure maximum effectiveness. AERs are often used for flexible endoscope reprocessing and therefore should be included in the guidelines. Periodic maintenance on flexible endoscopes and AERs should always be carried out as the manufacturer advises. Mandatory reporting of lapses will give a better overview of cross-contamination of flexible endoscopes worldwide.

Disclosure of interest
None declared.

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