

Insideview

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Keeping their cool

New vests keep surgeons comfortable in operating room

In surgical suites on the Riverside campus at University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview, some orthopedic surgeons are performing procedures while tethered to an apparatus that resembles a cooler on a cart.

While, in the past, they would break out in a sweat during physically demanding surgeries, now they're comfortably cool. That's thanks to the cold water being pumped from the cooler through chambers sewn into the vests they wear under their surgical gowns.

Several surgeons at the medical center are benefiting from a relatively new convenience at the medical center. Called a Cool Vest™, the new apparel helps keep surgeons feeling refreshed and more alert during surgery. It also allows the surgery suite's temperature to be in a more comfortable range for patients.

Surgery suites are notorious for their cool temperatures—which presents a clinical challenge in maintaining a patient's body temperature during an operation.

A little more than a year ago, the thermostat dials were turned up in operating rooms on the medical center's Riverside campus to a balmy 70 degrees to improve patients' outcomes. Once patients are anesthetized, the temperature can be adjusted if patient's body temperature remains within a normothermic range.

While the warmer surgical suites are beneficial to patients,

they became a little too warm for some surgeons, especially those working on more physically demanding cases.

"We had surgeons, especially orthopedic surgeons, who would come out of the OR dripping wet," says Mary Kay Jennrich, perioperative services director on the Riverside campus. "Being hot in the OR is not a new problem, but our first concern was to attend to our patients' needs by keeping the rooms warmer and then find cooling options for the operative team."

Using technology developed for Nascar drivers, the vests contain more than 60 feet of tubing stitched into the fabric. It's connected to a cooling unit filled with ice water that is pumped throughout the vest.

The medical center purchased about a half dozen vests, as well as disposable gel vests that can be kept in a freezer and thrown away after use.

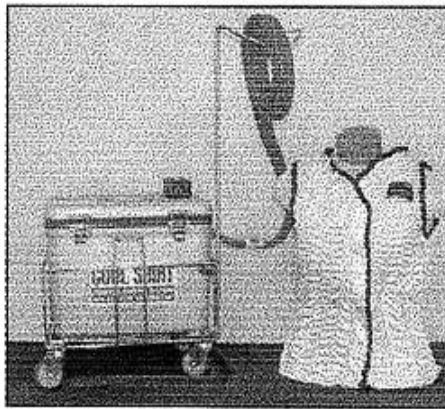
Surgeons were initially skeptical about the vests, Jennrich says, adding "until they tried them."

Now, the vests are quite popular for surgeons, says Joni Gultknecht, Riverside campus OR nurse manager. "One of our surgeons said he felt he had more energy at the end of the day after wearing one."

OR leaders are now looking into products that will help staff stay warm when the temperature is

turned down, particularly anesthesiologists, who are often positioned under air blowers in surgical suites.

For more information about the cooling vests, contact Jennrich, 612-273-4088, or Gultknecht, 612-273-6482.



Vests such as this one are helping keep surgeons at University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview cool in the operating room.

Questions or comments?

Call or E-mail the Comment Line:

612-273-6995 or dept-corp-cline1@fairview.org

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For news items, contact Shelby Dunski, editor, 612-672-6264, University of Minnesota Medical Center, Riverside campus, Room F-19 West, 2450 Riverside Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55454, or fax 612-672-4002. Comments and questions can be directed to 612-273-6995, or e-mail sdunski1@fairview.org. News items must be received by noon Tuesday the week prior to the next edition.

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