



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

30 MAY 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR:

SURGEON GENERAL OF THE ARMY
SURGEON GENERAL OF THE NAVY
SURGEON GENERAL OF THE AIR FORCE

SUBJECT: Clinical Reengineering: Policy For Gowning in Neonatal Intensive Care Units and Nurseries

This memorandum requests you reexamine policy for gowning by staff, parents, and visitors in neonatal intensive care units and nurseries. As a result of the application of sound principles of basic and clinical science ([references](#) attached), it has been demonstrated that wearing of gowns by nursery staff and the use of gowns by parents and visitors are not beneficial infection control activities, provided good hand-washing technique is followed. Routine gowning is an unnecessary, expensive custom, and does not reduce the risks of acquiring and transmitting infections among newborns, health care staff, parents, and visitors. The use of gowns over clothing (e.g., hospital-issued scrubs, duty uniforms, street clothes) by staff and parents when examining, feeding, holding, and providing other care to infants should be discontinued.

Appropriate barrier precautions and isolation protocols should be instituted for infants with infections or other special needs. Local policies and procedures should also address use of sterile supplies and aseptic technique when surgical and invasive procedures are performed in neonatal settings.

In accordance with accreditation requirements of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, hospitals are required to use a coordinated process to reduce the risks of infections in patients and health care workers. Neonatal intensive care units and nurseries should be included in surveillance, prevention, and control of infection activities.

Please provide me with a copy of any changes in policy and/or practice which result from this review by August 1, 1996. My point of contact is Colonel Dianne Bechtold, who can be reached at (703) 695-6800.

Stephen C. Joseph, M.D., M.P.H.

REFERENCE LIST

Clinical Reengineering: Policy for Gowning in Neonatal Intensive Care Units and Nurseries, May 1996

1. Oliver, Thomas K. Editorial: Gowning Does Not Affect Colonization or Infection Rates. **Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine**, **148**(10):1012. October 1994.
2. Pelke, Susan, Ching, Donna, Easa, David, and Melish, Marian E. Gowning Does Not Affect Colonization or Infection Rates in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. **Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine**, **148**(10):1016-20. October 1994.
3. Correction: Error in Figure. Gowning Does Not Affect Colonization or Infection Rates in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. **Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine**, **149**(2):173. February 1995.
4. Eason, Sarah. Are Cover Gowns Necessary in the NICU for Parents and Visitors? **Neonatal Network**, **14**(8):50. December 1995.