Major pelvic surgery may be associated with significant bleeding. Deep in the pelvis, small bleeding vessels are often difficult to identify. Washouts with normal saline or water are often used to aid clarity of the surgical field. To the naked eye, water and normal saline are both clear in a transparent bottle. However, water remains clear when in contact with blood, thus aiding the identification of individual bleeding small vessels (Figs 1 and 2). This effect is not observed with normal saline which gives a cloudy appearance. Furthermore, water has the theoretical benefits of tumour cell lysis by osmosis during the wash.¹

Reference

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Avoiding the unsanitary hip spica

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Treatment of infants with hip dysplasia commonly involves application of a hip spica for several months. During this period, the spica invariably becomes heavily soiled around the perineal opening. Gore-tex® (WL Gore and Associates, Inc., Flagstaff, AZ, USA) cast liners have previously been shown to avoid skin excoriation

Figure 1 Hip spica (A) before and (B) after application of sanitary towels.

from soiled casts.¹ These cast liners are, however, expensive. We describe a simple, cheap, and replaceable alternative. Disposable adhesive sanitary towels are folded over the cast edges, with absorbent surfaces facing the perineum (Fig. 1). Towels can be changed by the infant's parents once soiled. We recommend a wingless ultra-thin towel for ease of application.

Reference

1. Wolff CR, James P. The prevention of skin excoriation under children's hip spica casts using the Gore-Tex pantaloons. *J Pediatr Orthop* 1995; **5**: 386–8.

Keeping it neat in vascular surgery

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For vascular operations where a drain is required postoperatively, a minor modification to standard technique can be used to enhance visibility. Further, small (~1 cm) incisions can be made proximal and distal to the wound and vascular clamps inserted through them. The clamps are then advanced into the operative field. Control of the inflow and outflow of the vessel is thereby obtained, the clamps' movement being limited by the tissues, thus removing the requirement for a towel clip or an assistant to

Figure 1 Hip spica (A) before and (B) after application of sanitary towels.

Figure 1 Vascular clamp controlling the femoral artery.

support them. Figure 1 shows the vascular clamp in position controlling the femoral artery. After the operation has been completed, the separate skin incisions can be utilised for placement of drains if required.

DIY surgical knot-tying tool

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The ability to tie a safe, secure knot is one the first and most fundamental skills that a surgeon learns. Traditional simulators that are used by trainee surgeons to practise knot tying are based around a fixed hook attached to a surface or attached inside of a

Figure 1 Illustration of technique.

cup to simulate knot tying down into the pelvis. It has been suggested that the more junior a trainee surgeon is the more force they apply to the structure being tied. *In vivo*, this can result in problems like vessel avulsion. This simple DIY technique allows a trainee surgeon to practise knot tying whilst also practising the skill of not applying too much force to the structure being suture ligated, something that can not be practised on a fixed hook simulator. An empty 330-ml drink can is needed. The ring pull is positioned upright as illustrated (Fig. 1). The can is placed on a piece of A4 paper and a circle drawn around the side of the can. The trainee then uses the ring pull to practise tying knots without moving the can outside of the circle or lifting the can from the surface. This provides for a cheap, simple and readily available training tool.

Tibial bone grafting for lateral tibial plateau fractures

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Sources of bone graft for treating lateral tibial plateau fractures include iliac crest, distal femur and medial tibia.¹ We describe a technique whereby bone is taken from the lateral tibia itself thus avoiding donor site morbidity. Figure 1 illustrates metaphyseal cancellous bone being translocated to fill a subchondral bone