Suture Self-Removal By Patients

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The use of non-absorbable sutures for lacerations in the ED is common. Providing the patients with the necessary equipment and knowledge regarding self-removal of sutures may enable some patients to remove their own sutures at home.

Patients who are sutured with non-absorbable sutures in the Emergency Department (ED) are asked to follow up with their family doctor or local medical clinic for suture removal. An office visit and possibly tray fee are often billed for suture removal. This represents a significant cost to the health care system. Visiting a physician for suture removal may be an inconvenience to the patient and could result in time loss from work. Suture removal, especially for simple lacerations is easy to do. Given clear instructions along with proper equipment, suture removal could be done by the patient or a family member.

A recent study from the Annals of Emergency Medicine September 2009 found that 24% of patients removed their own non absorbable sutures. They found that 85% of the patients in this study would have preferred to remove their own sutures if they were given suitable instructions on how to do so.

The use of non-absorbable sutures for lacerations in the ED is common. Providing the patients with the necessary equipment and knowledge regarding self-removal of sutures may enable some patients to remove their own sutures at home. This could represent a significant change to the current practice in the ED. As well, this could result in a significant cost saving to the health care system and the patient.

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