

## **STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE - 4013**

### **PRODUCT SHELF LIFE – MONITORING AND ACTION**

**PURPOSE:** To establish a standard operating procedure to insure expired items are being removed from patient use.

**POLICY:** All healthcare workers must check to see if the product is still within its stated shelf life before dispensing and before being used in patient care. Shelf life has to do with the safe use of a product and pertains to both sterile and non-sterile product. Sterility is event related; however, there are other variables that contribute to shelf life.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. For commercially sterilized products the expiration dates may be communicated in several different ways. The manufacturer should be called if there is any question about the location of the outdate.
2. It is important to become familiar with each product, note the way the expiration date is assigned, and the use of the universal hour glass symbol. Manufacturers use expiration dating, such as stating, “use by” while another will state, “product expires 1 year from date of manufacture”, or “use by” date specified.
3. Commercial items that are expired or near expiration should be returned to the company for credit if possible prior to being discarded.
4. For reusable items sterilized, the expiration dates are assigned as follows:
  - a. Items double wrapped in muslin and paper, spun-bond fabrics or non-woven materials have a shelf life of 30 days.
  - b. Items placed and sealed in peel packs have a shelf life of 1 year.
  - c. Items placed in rigid containers have a shelf life of 1 year.
  - d. Items dust covered have a shelf life of 1 year.
5. Reusable items that have reached the expiration date must be returned to the decontamination area for cleaning and then for reprocessing. As items outdate they should be evaluated to determine if there is a need for continued sterilization of the product.
6. All items must be checked for expiration dates and package integrity on a regular schedule, preferably weekly, and prior to dispensing.

References: VA Handbook 7176, Supply, Processing and Distribution Operational Requirements  
SPD Training Manual

4/30/2003