



## Hospital's surgical tool was improperly sterilized

### Some patients need HIV, hepatitis tests

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A third Scripps hospital, the Green Hospital of Scripps Clinic in La Jolla, has notified numerous patients that an instrument used in their surgeries might have been improperly sterilized, and encouraged patients to be tested for HIV and hepatitis.

The 80 patients who received the notification during the past two weeks had either stomach reduction or bariatric surgery between March 2005 and April 2006, or a different procedure for gastroesophageal reflux disease over a 13-month period from March 2005 to April 2006.

< The instrument used in both operations is called a “bougie,” a thin rubber tube used to measure the size of the esophagus and the depth of the stomach. It was not properly disinfected in accordance with policy, Scripps said in a letter to patients May 30.

“Although highly unlikely, you may have been exposed to a bloodborne virus such as hepatitis B and C. And while it is true that HIV is also a bloodborne virus, there have been no reports of HIV transmission and only a few instances of hepatitis B and C transmission with similar events in the United States,” the letter stated.

It was signed by Robin Brown, Scripps Green chief executive, and Dr. John Romine, chief of the Scripps Green staff.

The bougie devices were sterilized with Betadine solution and alcohol, but not with a higher level disinfectant called Steris, Brown said. He added that different employees were involved. A nurse involved in the improper procedure at Scripps Green has been placed on administrative leave, he said.

The improper sterilization procedure came to light because of an extensive audit undertaken at all Scripps hospitals last month after 299 bariatric patients at Scripps Memorial Hospital and six bariatric patients at Scripps Mercy hospital were operated on using an improperly sterilized gastroscope.

In those instances, a supervisor – who is no longer employed by Scripps – told subordinates to skip a third sterilization process that should have been performed to completely sterilize the gastroscopes at Scripps Mercy in Hillcrest and at Scripps Memorial, Scripps officials said.

The patients were undergoing obesity surgery through the Wittgrove Bariatric Center, based at Scripps Memorial.

Scripps officials said they don't know how many of the 385 patients whose surgeries involved improperly sterilized instruments have undergone testing, but of 200 tests done so far, none have been positive, said Scripps spokesman Don Stanziano.

Concerned patients are urged to call (858) 554-3600.