

# Care in the comfort zone

Replacing makeshift solutions with instant hot and cold packs



## A current approach to keeping patients comfortable

Nurses widely acknowledge that hot and cold therapy is a common way to treat swelling and keep patients comfortable, from new moms to ICU patients to those recovering from surgery. To provide the temperature therapy that patients need, nurses will often reach for “makeshift solutions.” Why does this happen?

A primary cause is that budget constraints and high patient census drive nurses to be creative when caring for patients, which includes fashioning their own hot and cold therapies from materials on hand. This creates more work for nurses who already have more than enough to do.

With a bedside nurse vacancy rate of 8.3 percent and an increasing turnover rate, nurses are overworked.<sup>1</sup> Creating a makeshift solution every time a patient needs temperature therapy just adds to that workload. There are other disadvantages as well, from increasing hospital risk to one of growing importance in the world of value-based care — making patients uncomfortable and decreasing their satisfaction.

What can hospitals do to help avoid the issues caused by makeshift solutions and improve patient comfort and satisfaction? A best practice to replace makeshift solutions with instant hot and cold packs. These packs eliminate guesswork and help avoid burns and other injuries, as well as patient discomfort. Most importantly, instant hot and cold packs consistently function within safe temperature ranges.

Let’s take a closer look at what makeshift solutions are, the challenges they create — and how instant hot and cold packs are a more effective way to administer temperature therapy.

## What are some common makeshift solutions?

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To apply cold therapy, a nurse might pack ice in a glove, biohazard bag, plastic bag or diaper. Hot therapy solutions include microwaving a towel or blanket; soaking a towel, diaper or chux pad in hot water and pulling saline bottles out of a warmer and wrapping them in a towel. While these makeshift solutions may seem like a short-term fix, they create many challenges, such as causing patient discomfort — even burns.

Improving the patient experience is not only the right thing to do, it also impacts the HCAHPS<sup>2</sup> scores that are key to succeeding with value-based purchasing.

And there has never been a more critical time to focus on satisfaction — according to a recent survey of 1,000 patients conducted by HIDA's Research and Analytics team, patients are paying close attention to the care they receive and the medical products used during treatment.<sup>3</sup>

### **Makeshift solutions can also cost a facility real money and damage its reputation.**

For example, “never events” such as burns can result in financial penalties. Just as important, patients are taking note of providers who have a record of never events.

There are the hidden cost implications of makeshift solutions as well — while nurses feel they're helping reduce patient discomfort, they may not realize the increase in soft dollar costs due to the time spent creating makeshift solutions. In addition, nurses may not understand the potential liability of using an untested and uncontrolled product for treatment.

And taking that extra time can have an impact on the quality of patient care. According to one ICU nurse, “The time really adds up to fill multiple plastic bags of ice for a single patient. As an ICU nurse caring for patients who weren't in stable condition, I recognized that these makeshift solutions were taking valuable time away from being at the patient's bedside.”

She explained the advantages of using an instant cold pack instead. “The better way is to simply go to the supply room, grab a cold pack and then get right back to your patient.” She added that these packs also avoid unanticipated spills caused by makeshift solutions. “These spills just add to the time that is better spent caring for patients.”

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– **Asilinn La Brie**, RN, MBA

## How do makeshift solutions cause patient discomfort?

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Both hot and cold makeshift solutions can lower patient satisfaction in several ways:



### **Heat therapy**

As hot towels cool off, they can make patients uncomfortable. In addition, the temperature is unpredictable: hot packs are FDA-regulated for patient safety, so they won't reach a burning temperature. In contrast, warm or hot water out of a faucet isn't as predictable — and nurses must take the time to use their judgement. Instant hot packs remove the uncertainty.



### **Cold therapy**

Makeshift ice bags can leak. As a result, patients can be uncomfortable lying in cold, wet sheets. In addition to affecting patient care, this may negatively impacting patient satisfaction.

## What are options for safe and effective temperature therapy treatment?

Instant hot and cold packs are an established way to overcome the limitations of makeshift solutions. These packs are designed to keep patients comfortable while saving nurses time. With instant activation, you won't need to wait to achieve the desired temperature. To eliminate guesswork and help avoid burns, the packs consistently function within safe temperature ranges.

Instant cold packs help prevent patient discomfort due to the wetness ice packs cause. And instant hot and cold packs can be applied directly to the skin, requiring no added layers help keep patients comfortable.

As you replace makeshift solutions with instant hot and cold packs, aim for these key objectives:

- **Apply effective therapy.** Ensure nurses are treating patients with a safe temperature and effective therapy window.
- **Standardized solution.** By converting to instant hot and cold packs for temperature therapy, you'll improve efficiency, and help ensure the right treatment is available for the right patient. Via standardization, you'll also reduce risk by decreasing product variation.
- **Consistent utilization.** Making instant packs an established protocol and reaching for one every time improves reliability, convenience and time savings.
- **Better time management.** Empower nurses to take back more time for patient care, comfort and satisfaction.

## Cardinal Health — the #1 brand for instant heat and cold therapy.<sup>4</sup>

By making instant hot and cold packs a hospital-wide best practice, nurses can make patients safer and more satisfied—while saving time that can be redirected to what matters most—patient care.

To learn more about the value of instant hot and cold packs, ask your Cardinal Health representative.

### Instant pack advantages:

- Provides recommended safe and consistent temperature therapy for up to **30 minutes**
- Maintains safe and effective temperatures
- Can be applied directly to the skin
- Designed for use on-the-go
- Activates instantly, without microwaving or refrigerating
- Gives nurses more time back for patient care



1 (NS) Nursing Solutions 2016 National Healthcare Retention & RN Staffing report, 6 2016.

2 The Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) is a patient satisfaction survey mandated by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS). For more information, visit <http://www.hcahpsonline.org>.

3 The 2016 HIDA Horizon Report: Patient Satisfaction is published by the Health Industry Distributors Association, Copyright 2016.

4 Based on GHX data for heat/cold therapy US Hospital Market Q1 2018.