



PR757 issued 26th May 2009

Antimicrobial Copper Surgeries

Technical support for healthcare design and innovation with copper

Designers, specifiers and entrepreneurs are responding to clinical confirmation that copper surfaces reduce levels of micro-organisms in a hospital environment by seeking practical guidance on how to incorporate copper in their healthcare designs. Copper Development Association (CDA) is reacting to this need by offering free technical consultations with their product development advisor at a series of antimicrobial copper surgeries.

The Selly Oak clinical trial results, announced at an international infection control conference last October, showed that copper surfaces had 90-100% fewer micro-organisms on them compared to standard products. Professor Tom Elliott, trial leader, Consultant Microbiologist and Deputy Medical Director at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, has stated that the findings indicate that copper surfaces decrease real-world contamination and may be useful in the fight against healthcare-associated infections.

CDA Director, Angela Vessey, explained: "Since the Selly Oak results were announced, we have begun to see both demand for healthcare products which exploit copper's natural antimicrobial properties and interest from the supply chain in responding to this demand. Several NHS Trusts and care homes are considering refitting bathroom areas with copper in an effort to break the chain of infection between patients and their environment.

"The manufacturers who provided components for the Selly Oak trial are now gearing up to supply products such as door handles, taps, grab rails and even toilet seats, but there are a whole host of other touch surfaces which could incorporate copper to provide a 'whole ward solution'. CDA's role is to work with the supply chain to help develop the full range of products; beds and stethoscopes are of particular interest."

Antimicrobial Product Development Consultant Mark Tur has been working with manufacturers for the last three years to supply the copper alloy components to the trial and he has developed a good understanding of the queries raised by companies now wishing to turn to copper alloys.

“Copper has got a great attribute, that is, apart from the fact that it kills bugs. It has great fabricity and that means you can make it into all sorts of things. You can cast it into a complicated shape like a tap, then machine complex geometry into it very easily. Copper alloys can be fabricated using hand or power presses, allowing for modern low infection designs with fewer sharp corners. These aspects challenge designers to use their imagination creatively and manufacturers to fabricate re-engineered products. You can use all sorts of clever shaping processes with it – it’s very easy to work with – it’s a manufacturers dream in many ways.

“Manufacturers who are more familiar with other materials, such as stainless steel or aluminium, welcome a practical and frank discussion about where and how to use copper. In recent months I have dealt with enquiries for flooring, air conditioning ducting and door furniture. By holding product surgeries I hope to deal with enquiries more efficiently to get a full range of products available as soon as possible. If you are in the healthcare product design field, you need to start thinking about copper.”

Surgeries will be held in central London starting in July (dates to be announced). If you are interested in booking a free consultation or wish to join the Antimicrobial Copper Interest Group then please contact bryony.samuel@copperdev.co.uk.

Copper Development Association also offers numerous free resources on their website www.copperinfo.co.uk/antimicrobial, including a virtual product catalogue, and technical support on all aspects of copper use via an online enquiry system.



Dressing trolley photograph courtesy of OMC Technologies.



Prototype stethoscope.

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