

CORRESPONDENCE

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Standard Colors for Intravenous Cannulas

To the Editor:—Stehling reported “patients frequently come to the O.R. with indwelling intravenous catheters of unknown gauge *in situ*.”¹ The difficulty is compounded by the lack of a uniform color code to distinguish the size of cannula, for each manufacturer uses a different color code. She stressed “the problem is of considerable magnitude in hospitals that serve as referral centers, those in which the vendor is changed frequently, and when various brands are used in the same institution.”¹

I recalled this letter when a Japanese manufacturer assured me that his cannulas complied with the ISO international color code (ISO-6009-1981). On referring to this standard, I found that 16 countries including Canada, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom had voted approval, and that the sole vote of disapproval was cast by the USA. In casting this vote the USA Technical Advisory Group reported to the ISO Technical Committee 84, which evolved this standard, that “the US position is that it encourages the adoption of an international color code, but finds the choice of colors not totally acceptable. There is a general reluctance on the part of some major US manufacturers to accept a color code completely different from the one their company has adopted and established with the users of its products.”

However, I understand that when some of these companies supply their products to European countries which adopted the international standard color code, they supply them with hubs in the international standard

colors. Therefore, there appears no technical difficulty in complying with a standard color code if the companies' sales departments can be persuaded to agree.

The medley of color codes presently used by US suppliers reported by Stehling are given in table 1, together with the metric equivalent of the US gauge sizes and the international standard colors.

Some time ago, the Sterile Disposable Devices Committee of the Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation evolved a draft standard on such intravenous cannulas. Latterly, the draft standard has languished possibly due to lack of user interest. Anesthesiologists, together with nurses and physicians working in intensive care and emergency medicine, all have an opportunity to make their wishes known to the manufacturers by joining in this standards work.

Resolute action by concerned clinicians could solve this problem and thereby simplify all our clinical practices.

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REFERENCE

1. Stehling LC: Standardization of intravenous cannulas. *ANESTHESIOLOGY* 53:436-437, 1980

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TABLE 1. Confusion of Colors Used on Catheters in US Compared with Clear Range of Standard Colors Used in Other Countries

	Present U. S. Catheter Colors				
	14-gauge	16-gauge	18-gauge	20-gauge	22-gauge
Abbocath (Abbott)	Gold/tan	Grey	Green	Pink	Dark blue
Medicut (Argyle)	Orange/tan	Grey	Green	Dark pink	Blue
IV Cath (B-D)	Light grey	Lavender	Light pink	Light yellow	Dark grey
Longdwell (B-D)	Olive	Purple	Pink	Yellow	Black
Angiocath (Deseret)	Pink	Yellow	Tan	Light green	Light blue
Cathlon (Jelco)	Orange	Grey	Green	Pink	Dark blue
Quick Cath (Vicra)	Orange	Grey	Light green	Light pink	Light blue
ISO 6009 International Standard Colors					
Equivalent ISO 6009 metric size	2.0-mm	1.6-mm	1.2-mm	0.9-mm	0.7-mm
	Light green yellow	White	Pink	Yellow	Black