

Design of a Wound Protector/Retractor for Thyroid Surgery

Product Design Specifications

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May 4, 2011

Function:

Because of the risks of scarring, smaller incisions are being used in thyroid surgery. These small incisions still require retractors to keep the site visible, but most traditional retractors are incompatible with the smaller incisions. The currently used metal retractors distribute pressure unevenly across the incision site, which can cause ischemic trauma to the local tissues. On the other hand, our client tested the Alexis ® device (a round, flexible wound retractor used for abdominal surgery) and requests a similar device for thyroid surgery. The goal is to construct a device that is precise, provides a comfortable fit, and is capable of evenly distributing pressure across the site of incision.

Client Requirements:

Our client wants a retraction device that meets the following requirements:

- Delocalizes pressure over a large contact area
- Is compatible with varying anatomies
- Opens the wound in an “eye” shape (ellipse with pointed edges)
- Minimizes damage to tissue
- Is compatible with electrocautery (i.e. insulating)
- Ideally reusable

Design Requirements:

1. Physical and Operational characteristics

a. Performance requirements: The retractor must retract the skin for a variety of anatomies with less damage and provide equal distribution of pressure around entire incision. Uneven distribution of force causes localized damage to the tissue which results in bruising and scarring. The incision should be held open by the retractor in a football shape or reasonable close (ie oval). The device also should be easily inserted and removed (see *1.g.Ergonomics*).

b. Safety: The retractor should be able to insulate the skin from heat and possible burning by electrocautery (see *f. Operating Environment*). It must be biocompatible and cannot increase risk of infection.

c. Accuracy and Reliability: The device should be able to maintain retraction under normal surgical conditions. The retractor must be compatible with varied anatomies. The factor safety must account for the wide range of anatomies that the device will be used with. Ideally the retractor could be used in other surgical procedures.

- d. *Life of Service:* The retractor must last length of surgery (approximately 60 to 90 minutes), including exposure to electrocautery.
- e. *Shelf Life:* The retractor must be durable enough to withstand room temperature storage while maintaining sterilization.
- f. *Operating Environment:* While in the operating room, the retractor will be exposed to electrocautery which creates frequency upwards of 100 kHz and power of 120 watts.
- g. *Ergonomics:* The retractor must be easily handled by one person and apply enough pressure to hold incision open but not enough pressure to damage tissues. One person must be able to not only insert and remove the retractor at the start of the operation but also adjust the view throughout the operation. The retractor should slow down or inhibit the standard course of events in the operating room. In addition, the device should not have excess bulk as to obscure the surgical field (see 1.h. Size, 1.i. Weight).
- h. *Size:* The retractor must fit in 3.5 to 4 centimeter incision and have a depth of 2 to 4 centimeters. It cannot obstruct access or view of surgical field.
- i. *Weight:* The specific weight was not specified by client. The device, however, should not have excessive weight to damage tissues (approximately 8 ounces).
- j. *Materials:* Materials must be biocompatible. Ideal materials provide desired device safety features (see 1.b. Safety).
- k. *Aesthetics, Appearance, and Finish:* The retractor should have a smooth surface to avoid skin damage. If possible, it should be transparent. The spring metal retractor must not have sharp edges that will penetrate the skin.

2. **Production Characteristics**

- a. *Quantity:* Two reusable (ie revised spring metal retractor) or three single-use (ie revised Alexis design) retractors should be made.
- b. *Target Product Cost:* Total budget should not exceed \$500. Individual retractors should not exceed \$100 per unit.

3. **Miscellaneous**

- a. *Standards and Specifications:* The retractor must meet FDA requirements for clinical trials. IRB approval is required for testing in animals. The device must be able to function in a tissue breast model.
- b. *Customer:* The client would prefer a device that is easy to use and provides natural retraction with equal force. The device would ideally be reusable but not at the cost of functionality.
- c. *Patient-related concerns:* The retractor must be small enough to reduce visible scarring from surgery (see 1.a. Performance Requirements). Also, the retractor must be compatible with a wide range of anatomies (see 1.c. Accuracy and Reliability).
- d. *Competition:* The Alexis O Wound Retractor and the Gelpi retractor are two products currently used in thyroid surgery. Neither is ideal; the Alexis device is too long, and the Gelpi retractor is too damaging.