

Basic Detail Report



Surgical Knife

Date
1760

Medium
Wood, metal

Description

Amputating knife with a long curved metal blade and a wooden (lignum Vitae) handle. Used by surgeons for amputating limbs. Speed was of the essence when carrying out amputations as the wound bled profusely and had to be stopped as quickly as possible or the patient would die. In addition the knife needed to be extremely sharp. Used in conjunction with a bone saw the amputation could be done in less than a minute, possibly even as little as 30 seconds. For most of human history, however, even 30 seconds would seem like a lifetime to the patient. Anaesthetics were not used regularly until the mid-19th century and even then surgeons preferred the patient awake, if only to make sure they were still alive for the duration for the procedure.

Dimensions

Object/Work: 350 x 33 x 27 mm