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HAND HYGIENE TIMES

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Hand Hygiene: An Indicator for Patient Safety in Every Healthcare Organization

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Virtually every healthcare organization is focused on the delivery of high-quality care and improving patient safety, and infection control is a key aspect of both. It is well known that hand hygiene is one of the simplest infection control measures, and arguably the most important.¹ Many healthcare facilities have ample room for hand hygiene improvement even if they are reporting high rates of compliance via direct observation.

Hand hygiene is a marker for overall patient safety in an organization. Healthcare facilities that have allocated the resources to tackle the complexities of hand hygiene through a multi-modal approach have had to address issue across hierarchies and specialty disciplines to do so. When such efforts are successful and result in improved safety culture, there is often a cascading effect on other quality metrics. In 2013 University of North Carolina (UNC) Hospitals implemented a new hand hygiene program in all inpatient areas, despite having already high hand hygiene compliance. All healthcare workers (HCW) were asked to observe each other's hand hygiene and provide immediate feedback to colleagues - a departure from the previous method of covert direct observations by a select few. By involving as many HCW as possible all the time, UNC Hospitals was able to create a constant Hawthorne effect and develop a culture where it is not only acceptable but is expected that HCW provide reminders to one another when hand hygiene is not

performed. Over a 17-month study period, UNC Hospitals saw a statistically significant increase in their hand hygiene a statistically significant decrease in healthcare associated infection rates.²

To achieve success with hand hygiene initiatives, there are a few key points that healthcare facilities need to recognize. First, a blessing from leadership to proceed is not the same as true leadership support. Define what it is you need from your leadership and communicate it clearly. Second, frontline staff involvement is critical. Talk with them, learn from them, involve them in goal planning. They are KEY to the success of your hand hygiene initiative. Third, hand hygiene is the task that is performed the most in any healthcare setting; it is far reaching and involves many disciplines. The success of all hand hygiene initiatives needs to rest on the shoulders of an executive champion rather than exclusively on infection prevention and control professionals. And finally, be committed. Building and sustaining a successful hand hygiene program is a marathon, not a sprint. Culture change (the holy grail of quality improvement) involves reshaping longstanding behaviors and practices. This takes time, and time means years, not months.

The World Health Organization's Guide to Implementation³ provides a multi-modal approach to help you improve hand hygiene and patient safety.

¹ World Health Organization. WHO guidelines on hand hygiene in health care. First global patient safety challenge: clean care is safer care. http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2009/9789241597906_eng.pdf. Published 2009. Accessed July 23, 2019. • ² Sickbert-Bennett EE, DiBiase LM, Schade Willis TM, et al. Reduction of health-care-associated infections by exceeding high compliance with hand hygiene practices. *Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. 2016;22(9):1628-1630. • ³ World Health Organization. A guide to the implementation of the WHO multimodal hand hygiene improvement strategy. https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/Guide_to_Implementation.pdf. Published 2009. Accessed July 23, 2019.



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¹ Nielsen Sales 52wk ending 1/5/19 • ² Edmonds, et al. Comparative efficacy of commercially available alcohol-based hand rubs and World Health Organization-recommended hand rubs: formulation matters. Am J Infect Control. 2012 Aug; 40(6):521-5 • ³ Healthcare Personnel Handwash Study #100907-101, January 6, 2011, BioScience Laboratories, Bozeman, MT. Healthcare Personnel Handwash Study #111209-101, March 8, 2012, BioScience Laboratories, Bozeman, MT. When tested using the HCPHW test methodology against other hand sanitizers commonly used in healthcare facilities.
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