Hand Hygiene: A Critical Component to Preventing the Transmission of Infection in the Healthcare Environment

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hospital patients in the United States get an estimated 722,000 infections each year. Appropriate hand hygiene is the most important way to prevent the spread of infection. There are two methods for hand hygiene: alcohol-based sanitizer and washing with soap and water. The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed “Your 5 Moments of Hand Hygiene” which include before patient contact, before an aseptic task, after body fluid exposure risk, after patient contact and after contact with the patient environment.

To reduce the risk of preventable healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) and decrease the threat to patient safety by increasing hand hygiene compliance rates.

Hand hygiene observers (observers) were trained in November and December 2016 and participate in regular meetings. In January 2017, the MMCSC Hand Hygiene Team joined the RWJBarnabas Health Corporate Hand Hygiene Initiative. In February 2017 the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) initiated a methodology which he called “the CCTV effect.” The hypothesis was that this effect would create a perception of being watched, promoting good behavior and a subconscious adaptation of best practices. This method increased the total number of secret-shoppers and observations resulting in an increased secret-shopper unit ratio, increased number of individual MD/RN observations and a more credible data and interpretation. In addition, it raised awareness amongst the staff hospital-wide. Individual compliance data was shared in an open and transparent manner promoting accountability, enhancing nurse education and relying on peer pressure among physicians to achieve excellence. Punitive and confrontational measures were discouraged as they were found to be counter-productive.

Hand hygiene compliance rates increased from 54.55% in January 2017 to 95.33% in August 2017. This may be attributed to “the CCTV effect” which has promoted good habits, a culture of improved patient care and best practices, in addition to providing a more extensive and reliable data. Increased observer numbers and observations, improved observer training and enhanced hospital-wide staff involvement with the hand hygiene program are significant contributing factors. A decrease was demonstrated in hospital acquired infection rates from 2016 to 2017. It can be concluded that hand hygiene is critical in preventing healthcare-associated infections and thereby, saving lives.