

WHO News

International Consultation on Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings

(From: <http://www.who.int/patientsafety/en/>)

The first International Consultation on Hand Hygiene in Healthcare settings took place at the World Health Organization, Geneva, 3 December 2004. The Consultation examined a number of existing WHO and other international and regional strategies and guidelines in the areas of hand hygiene and infection prevention. The main objective of the Consultation was to review available evidence on hand hygiene in Healthcare settings, and to prepare an outline of the WHO Guidelines on Hand Hygiene.

Background

Healthcare-associated infection is a major, global issue of patient safety as it affects millions of people worldwide and complicates a significant proportion of patient-care deliveries. Infections add to the burden of resource use, promote resistance to antibiotics, and contribute to unexpected patient deaths.

Hand hygiene remains the primary measure to reduce infection and the spread of antimicrobial resistance, but healthcare workers' adherence to good practice is extremely low. Risk factors for the lack of adherence to hand hygiene have been identified. Adherence must be multimodal and include staff education and motivation, the use of performance indicators, and a strong commitment by stakeholders (e.g. hospital management, community leaders). A system change must be addressed in most healthcare settings where alcohol-based hand disinfection has not become standard of care. Hand hygiene, a very simple action, results in reduced infection rates and enhanced patient safety across all settings, from advanced healthcare systems to local dispensaries in developing countries.

Background to meeting

WHO launched a World Alliance for Patient Safety on 27th October 2004. The fundamental purpose of the Alliance will be to facilitate the development of patient safety policy and practice in all WHO member states. Each year the Alliance will deliver a number of work programmes covering systemic and technical aspects of patient safety. A key programme for the Alliance is the delivery of a "Global Patient Safety Challenge". The topic chosen for the first challenge is healthcare-associated infections and the title of the challenge is "Clean Care is Safer Care". The intention will be to examine a number of existing WHO strategies and guidelines in the areas of infection prevention, blood safety, procedure-related safety, equipment safety and others, in order to develop a comprehensive and integrated WHO

strategy for hand hygiene. Initially, closely-monitored implementation of the integrated strategy will take place in six geographical districts, one in each WHO region, to assess its impact.

Objectives for 2005

- Designate hand hygiene in health care settings as a patient safety priority worldwide.
- Initiate clinical governance for hand hygiene promotion at all levels of healthcare settings.
- Develop comprehensive hand hygiene in health care settings promotion guidelines that include: staff education and motivation to promote behavioural modification facilitation of system changes, use of performance indicators, and engagement of stakeholder support.
- Issue recommendations and develop instruments for continuous, long-term monitoring and feedback mechanisms, as well as outcome measures, to monitor progress.

It is intended that the final guidelines be published by May 2005.