

Hidden Areas of Infection in U.S. Hospitals

Website

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla., June 27 /PRNewswire/ -- Health care facilities in the U.S. are entering a new era of "zero tolerance" for healthcare-associated infections (HAI). Could there be hidden areas of infection that are being overlooked? A new public health education program from the production company Mission Critical attempts to answer that question.

The program, entitled "Hidden Areas of Infection," (<http://www.missioncriticaltv.com/index-8-1.html>) documents how an acute care facility in Virginia is solving this enormous infection control problem through planning, education, and the right equipment -- including the widespread use of disposable products. Prime targets for disposable technologies are reusable products that see use on thousands of different patients, which can dramatically increase the risk of cross-contamination. Examples include blood pressure cuffs, pulse oximetry sensors, and electrocardiogram (ECG) wires.

Public awareness of the HAI epidemic is growing, helped by advocacy groups such as the non-profit Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths (RID). Dr. Betsy McCaughy, the former Lt. Governor of New York, founded this group in response to a stunning statistic: Annual deaths from hospital infections in the U.S. -- some 103,000 deaths per year -- exceed the death toll from AIDS, breast cancer, and auto accidents combined (<http://www.hospitalinfection.org/>).

In addition to the moral imperative, hospitals will soon have another compelling incentive to reduce infection rates -- one that affects their bottom lines and reputations. In October 2008, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will begin limiting reimbursements for certain infections as part of the HAI zero tolerance mandate. Through these and other actions, Congress hopes to create greater transparency around HAI events, including making hospital infection data available to the public. It is hoped that the end result will be a reduction in the number of HAIs as hospitals commit larger resources to combat the problem, which could also save taxpayers millions of dollars.

This documentary program from Mission Critical sheds light on long-overlooked practices that have been taken for granted by many in the health care community, until now. One of these practices is the implementation of strict cleaning protocols meant to reduce infection risks from reusable devices. However, as the program points out, cleaning procedures alone do not ensure the elimination of harmful pathogens. There is evidence, for example, that reusable ECG lead wires could be a significant hidden reservoir for the microorganisms that are now running rampant in U.S. health care facilities, despite the presence of cleaning procedures. In fact, one study conducted at the University of Wisconsin found that over 77% of reusable ECG lead wires tested harbored some strain of potentially deadly antibiotic-resistant pathogen after they had been cleaned.(1)

Inevitably, the cost of disposable devices needs to be weighed against the benefits. Fortunately, the experience of Bon Secours

St. Francis Hospital in Richmond, Virginia offers proof that the strategic use of disposable monitoring accessories, along with a comprehensive infection reduction program, can dramatically reduce not only cross-contamination risks, but also costs.(2)

It is hoped that educational programs such as "Hidden Areas of Infection" can continue to raise public awareness of this important issue and help hospitals prepare for potentially reduced CMS reimbursements related to hospital-acquired infections. As many health care providers are beginning to realize, reaching for "zero" infections is not only attainable, it is also cost-effective.

The Hidden Areas of Infection program will be broadcast into 89,000 hospitals in 88 countries within the next month. The Medical Broadcasting Channel reaches an estimated 14 million nurses, 9 million physicians, and an additional 5 million healthcare workers such as administrators and pharmacy.

(1) Jancin, B. (2004, March). Antibiotic-resistant pathogens found on 77% of ECG lead wires. *Cardiology News*. vol 2.

(2) Holden, D. (Project Manager). (2008, March). Hidden Areas of Infection [DVD]. Mission Critical: Capital Media Group; LS-954 - Bon Secours mentioned in DVD video.

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