

Forward

Approximately 5 percent of all patients admitted to hospitals across the United States develop an infection during their hospital stay. Such infections may prolong or complicate an illness, increase the time and cost of hospitalization and could cause permanent disability or death.

Definition

Healthcare-associated (formally called nosocomial) infections are those which occur in patients that have either been hospitalized or been in a healthcare setting and received care that resulted in an infection that was not present or incubating at the time of admission for care. When the incubation period is unknown, an infection is called healthcare-associated if it develops at any time after admission. An infection present on admission can be classified as healthcare-associated only if it is directly related to or is the residual of a previous admission. All infections that fail to satisfy these requirements are classified as community acquired.

Infections with endogenous organisms carried by the patient and with organisms originating in the animate or inanimate environment of the hospital may be designated to be healthcare-associated infections. The term “healthcare-associated infection” will include potentially preventable infections as well as some infections that may be regarded as inevitable.

The hospital is an area where many ill people are concentrated in close proximity. Some have infections and some are highly susceptible to infections because of their underlying illness (malignancy, collagen-vascular disease, diabetes, auto-immune deficiencies) or treatment with drugs that severely impair host resistance. The microbial “flora” of the hospital environment is comprised of many virulent and drug resistant organisms. All of these conditions serve to increase the risk of infection to patients.

Staff members working with patients are at increased risk to acquiring infections. Consequently, it is most important that a workable ongoing system for control and prevention of infections exists. The Infection Control Program is the hospital’s medical, ethical and legal responsibility to all patients and personnel.

Hand washing can be considered the single most important factor in reducing the spread of infection. Some general measures for decreasing the risk to patients include the following:

1. Use of Foley catheters only when absolutely necessary, discontinuing as soon as possible.
2. Limitation of time and judicious use of arterial, CVP, hyperalimentation, and other indwelling lines.
3. Close monitoring of patients requiring any type of artificial airway and mechanical ventilator support.

4. Meticulous sterilization/disinfection of equipment (i.e. respiratory therapy, central service) and monitoring devices which come in contact with patients.
5. Careful and appropriate use of antimicrobial therapy.
6. Maintenance of a clean hospital environment.
7. Strict aseptic technique when performing any invasive, diagnostic or treatment procedure, when handling open wounds (dressing changes, etc.) and during all surgical procedures.

Objectives

The objective of the Infection Control Program at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth is to provide better and safer hospital facilities for our patients and personnel. An infection control program is essential for the prevention of healthcare-associated infections in addition to serving as a means of detection and control. The infection control program involves every hospital facility and the cooperation of every member of the hospital community. The efforts of any number of conscientious individuals are rendered ineffective when any break in technique or lapse in judgment on the part of any person occurs. Understanding the interrelationship that exists between the patient and his environment are most important in attaining these goals. Control of infections is everyone's personal responsibility.

The role of the community, as it relates to healthcare, must be considered in any effort to control healthcare-associated infections. Although the major emphasis of the Infection Control Committee will be given to healthcare-associated infections, consideration must also be given to those infections brought into the hospital and those subsequently manifested after discharge.

It is imperative that all personnel relating to patients and patient care areas become familiar with the information contained in this manual which is relevant to their particular job situation.

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