Getting Back to the Basics: Hand Washing 101

Abigail Mitchell, DHEd, MSN, RN, CNE, FHERSDA; Graduate Nursing Director
Heather Nugent, RN, BSN- Infection Control Prevention

Abstract

Handwashing is one of the most important ways of reducing the spread of infection. However, despite the many studies and literature hand washing compliance rates remain low. Lack of hand washing is a global issue. Each year, HAIs affect 722,000 patients and approximately killing 75,000 of them (Musuuza et al, 2016). To assist hospitals with reducing the risk of HAIs, evidence-based guidelines have been introduced by multiple national and international agencies, often with a focus on the role of hand hygiene for lowering infection rates. Florence Nightingale’s environmental theory guided this study. Her theory changed the face of nursing to create sanitary conditions for patients to receive care and improved sanitation in the hospital setting. The goal of nursing is to facilitate a healing process by placing the patient in the best possible environment.

Infection Control through History

Medieval Era (5th to 15th centuries). Bubonic plague killed about one-third of all people in Europe. In the 18th century, public health laws started to appear. In addition to plague, epidemics of smallpox, influenza, dysentery and typhus were common. The first European hospitals (spittle houses) were established in the 12th century. These houses were outside of city walls, and had large burial grounds. Hospitals were hazardous places. In the 19th century Infection Control Committees were developed. Main concern: vermin in beds, hospital stench, surgical site infections, policy for corpse removal. In 1500-1800, yellow fever, smallpox, measles with massive outbreaks of cholera. Surgery was still deadly. During the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale started the process by calling the Sanitary Commission. Which led to a reduction in the death rates. Moving on to WWII era; public health efforts increased. TB, diphtheria, measles, puerperal sepsis declined with the release of antibiotics. In 1946 the CDC was founded, evolving out of the office of Malaria Control. In the mid 1980’s CDC initiated the National Nosocomial Infections Surveillance System to provide a mechanism for reporting HAIs are still a concern today.

Results

Audits were performed during day shifts only
Same sample size

Limitations

Barriers to Hand Washing

Lack of role modeling
Lack of sinks in patient care areas
Lack of social message strategy to communication programs promoting hand hygiene.
Lack of knowledge: the need to hum Happy Birthday twice (time factor).
Dispensers not in convenient locations
Empty product dispensers, product drying out hands. Perception of hand hygiene not being needed for the task.

Implications to Practice

Handwashing with soap is recognized as one of the most important means of reducing spread of infectious organisms, and is a cost effective way to prevent and decrease infection rates. Our results demonstrated the need for increase knowledge for all health care professionals on hand washing, and the use of product dispensers. In this healthcare system all product dispensers were changed over to one single product and locations changed to meet the demands of healthcare professionals. Another study to see if this change increased hand washing compliance and decreased infection rates should be completed.

Barriers to Hand Washing

Lack of role modeling
Lack of sinks in patient care areas
Lack of social message strategy to communication programs promoting hand hygiene.
Lack of knowledge: the need to hum Happy Birthday twice (time factor).
Dispensers not in convenient locations
Empty product dispensers, product drying out hands. Perception of hand hygiene not being needed for the task.

Implications to Practice

Handwashing with soap is recognized as one of the most important means of reducing spread of infectious organisms, and is a cost effective way to prevent and decrease infection rates. Our results demonstrated the need for increase knowledge for all health care professionals on hand washing, and the use of product dispensers. In this healthcare system all product dispensers were changed over to one single product and locations changed to meet the demands of healthcare professionals. Another study to see if this change increased hand washing compliance and decreased infection rates should be completed.

Abstract

Handwashing is one of the most important ways of reducing the spread of infection. However, despite the many studies and literature hand washing compliance rates remain low. Lack of hand washing is a global issue. Each year, HAIs affect 722,000 patients and approximately killing 75,000 of them (Musuuza et al, 2016). To assist hospitals with reducing the risk of HAIs, evidence-based guidelines have been introduced by multiple national and international agencies, often with a focus on the role of hand hygiene for lowering infection rates. Florence Nightingale’s environmental theory guided this study. Her theory changed the face of nursing to create sanitary conditions for patients to receive care and improved sanitation in the hospital setting. The goal of nursing is to facilitate a healing process by placing the patient in the best possible environment.

Infection Control through History

Medieval Era (5th to 15th centuries). Bubonic plague killed about one-third of all people in Europe. In the 18th century, public health laws started to appear. In addition to plague, epidemics of smallpox, influenza, dysentery and typhus were common. The first European hospitals (spittle houses) were established in the 12th century. These houses were outside of city walls, and had large burial grounds. Hospitals were hazardous places. In the 19th century Infection Control Committees were developed. Main concern: vermin in beds, hospital stench, surgical site infections, policy for corpse removal. In 1500-1800, yellow fever, smallpox, measles with massive outbreaks of cholera. Surgery was still deadly. During the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale started the process by calling the Sanitary Commission. Which led to a reduction in the death rates. Moving on to WWII era; public health efforts increased. TB, diphtheria, measles, puerperal sepsis declined with the release of antibiotics. In 1946 the CDC was founded, evolving out of the office of Malaria Control. In the mid 1980’s CDC initiated the National Nosocomial Infections Surveillance System to provide a mechanism for reporting HAIs are still a concern today.

Results

Audits were performed during day shifts only
Same sample size

Limitations

Barriers to Hand Washing

Lack of role modeling
Lack of sinks in patient care areas
Lack of social message strategy to communication programs promoting hand hygiene.
Lack of knowledge: the need to hum Happy Birthday twice (time factor).
Dispensers not in convenient locations
Empty product dispensers, product drying out hands. Perception of hand hygiene not being needed for the task.

Implications to Practice

Handwashing with soap is recognized as one of the most important means of reducing spread of infectious organisms, and is a cost effective way to prevent and decrease infection rates. Our results demonstrated the need for increase knowledge for all health care professionals on hand washing, and the use of product dispensers. In this healthcare system all product dispensers were changed over to one single product and locations changed to meet the demands of healthcare professionals. Another study to see if this change increased hand washing compliance and decreased infection rates should be completed.