Patient empowerment as a strategy to help prevent healthcare acquired infections

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Published studies


• What is ‘patient empowerment’

The European Patients Forum: “A process that helps people gain control over their own lives and increases their capacity to act on issues that they themselves define as important.”

WHO: “A process through which people gain greater control over decisions and actions affecting their health”

• Patient empowerment vs. patient participation

• Strategies to involve patients fall into four categories:
  1. Educating patients so that they are better able to manage their treatment regime safely
  2. Getting patients to intervene directly when there is risk of an error
  3. Inviting patients to provide feedback on the care received
  4. Directly involving patients in system wide strategies to improve safety

http://www.eu-patient.eu/campaign/PatientsprescribE/
Patient empowerment strategies previously used to:

• Help patients choose personally meaningful, realistic goals, especially goals related to weight loss, nutrition, and physical activity
• Promote diabetes care
• Promote medication adherence
• Improve patient safety after surgery
• Foster open communication with staff

Focus groups: people with AIDS, asthma, heart failure, arthritis, and people with disabilities and/or chronic conditions etc.
Patient empowerment and infection control

The WHO Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Health Care (2009): 10

- Encourage partnership between patients, their families, and health-care workers to promote hand hygiene in health-care setting

- The responsibility for hand hygiene rests firmly with the health-care worker, to encourage patients to support health-care workers in improving hand hygiene in various ways, such as learning about hand hygiene best practices and reminding or evaluating hand hygiene.

http://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/tools/9789241597906/en/
Yes I would be happy to ask

Of course I would ask

But in reality, things are very different

It is my right to ask the staff member
This pilot study aimed to examine the receptiveness of hospital patients toward a new empowerment tool aimed at increasing awareness and engagement of patients in preventing HCAI.

**Methods**

- Patients from the surgical department were recruited and randomized into 2 groups: active and control.
- Patients in the active arm were given an empowerment tool, whereas control patients continued with normal practices.
- Pre- and post-surveys were administered.
- Focused on surgical patients
- We developed 2 empowerment tools: a flip chart and a brochure.
This brochure has been developed by staff at the University of New South Wales and Hospital for a research study.

Remember

- It’s okay to ask questions and expect answers that you understand!
- If you notice any signs of infection like discomfort, redness or swelling, notify hospital staff at once
- Poor hand hygiene compliance by hospital staff, yourself or your visitors can increase your chance of an infections.

If you would like more information about healthcare associated infections, please speak to a medical staff member in the Department or your local GP.

Working together to stop infections from spreading in hospitals:

Ask
Speak up
Be proactive

An information brochure for patients in the Department of Surgery
Preventing infections
Your role: Ask questions

One of the easiest steps you can take to stop the spread of infections is to ask questions! If you are uncertain about something— it is important that you talk to the hospital staff.

For example, you may want more information about:

- Healthcare associated infections
- Tips for preventing an infection
- Why you are receiving a specific treatment
- Whether the procedure/drug/line is essential for your care
- How to practice hand hygiene and when to hygiene your hands
- The signs and symptoms of infection
- How to care for wounds, intravenous or catheter lines while at hospital or at home
- What should I do if I think I have an infection?

You may feel apprehensive about asking questions which seem to be challenging, but be assured that staff members are happy to answer your questions.

If you don’t feel comfortable asking the staff member your questions, consider getting a family member or friend to ask the question on your behalf.

Preventing infections
Your role: Speak up

As an infection control team member, you have an extremely important role to play while in the hospital.

**Hand hygiene:** All of us need a reminder once in a while and this includes hospital staff. Don’t be afraid to remind them to hand hygiene before touching you or your surroundings. It’s not an option anymore; it’s a recognised standard of basic care. Remember, you’re not being rude to politely demand to be touched with clean hands.

**Wound dressing:** let the staff know promptly if it becomes painful, loose or wet.

**Intravenous line or catheter:** let the staff know promptly if it dislodges

**Clean environment:** If you notice that the bathrooms or your room or wards is not clean, it is important that you tell the staff.

**Fact:** If proper hand hygiene practices were followed, 30 - 40% of healthcare associated infections could potentially be avoided.
Results

- 60 patients participated in the pilot
- 2 had received info about HCAIs previously
- 1/2 said they would be ‘highly willing’ to be involved with a prevention program
- Most said they would be willing to ask factual questions to both nurses and doctors
- 38.3% & 41.7% said they were either ‘highly’ or ‘somewhat willing’ to ask a challenging question
- Significantly more likely to report that they were willing to ask a doctor and a nurse a factual question then a challenging question
- Women were more likely than men (p<0.05) to report a willingness to challenge nurses to wash their hands.
- Almost all reported that they would be more willing to ask either factual or challenging questions if they received encouragement from either their nurse (90%) or their doctor (95%)
- They felt confident that they could help prevent or reduce their risks of infection while they were in hospital (33/48).
- 23 participants reported that they had notified a staff member about a health concern
- Only 3 asked a HCW (Doctor*1, Nurse*2) whether they had washed their hands.
- Participants recalled the main messages of the brochure
- Participants wanted more information on: what symptoms to look out for, on the myths about HCAI, and about the rate of infections in hospitals.
Multiple interlinking factors influence patients’ intention to get actively involved in preventing medical errors.

Exogenous
1. Socioeconomic factors: age, sex, education, ethnicity
2. Other external factors: available information, personal experiences, social norms.

Endogenous
- Feeling able to prevent an error or to provide input, perceived effectiveness of taking preventative action
Factors found to be associated with a willingness to ask HCWs to HH include:

- Younger age
- Being a woman
- Race (minority groups)
- Extraversion or expansive personality
- Level of education
- Being employed
- Being nonreligious
- Overestimating the incidence rate of HCAI
- Believing that patients can control their own behaviour
- Believing that participation would help to prevent HCAIs
- Belief that HCWs can infect patients
- Readiness to participate in either error prevention or around challenging staff
- Previous hospital stays,
- Higher familiarity with relevant information,
- Previous HCAI experiences
- Being concerned about HCAIs

In summary

- HCW authority is very strong
- Patients feel uncomfortable challenging the judgement or actions of their caregivers for the fear of being labelled as ‘difficult’, of offending staff and/or because of concerns of compromising their healthcare and safety
- Goes against societal expectations and accepted norms
- Staff members are willing to be reminded but are concerned about the impact on the patient/staff member relationship/aggressive patients
- Willingness to interact with staff members increases if the patient:
  1. Believes that the HCW would appreciate a reminder
  2. Has received a verbal invite from the staff member
- Encouragements can be verbal, posters, videos, other advertising material, visual aids such as badges etc.
- Remember that messages need to be delivered in multiple languages and also balance out visual/written cues.

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