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Infection Control Programme

Need for an infection control programme

The responsible health authority should develop a national (or regional) programme to support hospitals in reducing the risk of health-care-associated or nosocomial infections. More information on infection control programmes can be found in the document “Prevention of hospital-acquired infections” at:

<http://www.who.int/emc>

Such a programme must:

- set relevant national objectives consistent with other national health care objectives;
- develop and continually update guidelines for recommended health care surveillance, prevention, and practice;
- develop a national system to monitor selected infections and assess the effectiveness of interventions;
- harmonize initial and continuing training programmes for health care professionals;
- facilitate access to materials and products essential for hygiene and safety; and
- encourage health care establishments to monitor health-care associated (nosocomial) infections and to provide feedback to the professionals concerned.

The national or regional health authority should designate an agency to oversee the programme (a ministerial department, institution or other body),

and plan national activities with the help of a national expert committee. This committee would:

- review risks associated with new technologies, and monitor the risk of acquiring an infection from new devices and products, before their approval for use;
- review and provide input into investigation of outbreaks and epidemics;
- communicate and cooperate with other committees of the health care facility with common interests such as pharmacy and therapeutics or antimicrobial use committee, biosafety or health and safety committees, waste management committee and blood transfusion committee.

Each health care facility needs to:

- develop an infection control programme to ensure the well being of both patients and staff;
- develop annual work plan to assess and promote good health care, appropriate isolation; sterilization; and other practices, staff training, and epidemiological surveillance;
- provide sufficient resources to support the infection control programme.

Risk prevention for patients and staff is a concern of everyone in the facility, and must be supported by the senior administration.

What is an infection control programme?

The important components of the infection control programme are:

- basic measures for infection control, i.e. standard and additional precautions;
- education and training of health care workers;
- protection of health care workers, e.g. immunization;
- identification of hazards and minimizing risks;
- routine practices essential to infection control such as aseptic techniques, use of single use devices, reprocessing of instruments and equipment, antibiotic usage, management of blood/body fluid exposure, handling and use of blood and blood products, sound management of medical waste;

- effective work practices and procedures, such as environmental management practices including management of hospital/clinical waste, support services (e.g., food, linen), use of therapeutic devices;
- surveillance;
- incident monitoring;
- outbreak investigation;
- infection control in specific situations; and
- research.

In addition to implementing basic measures for infection control, health care facilities should prioritize their infection control needs and design their programmes accordingly.

Organization of an infection control programme

As with all other functions of a health care facility, the ultimate responsibility for prevention and control of infection rests with the health administrator.

The hospital administrator/head of hospital should:

- Establish an infection control committee which will in turn appoint an infection control team; and
- provide adequate resources for effective functioning of the infection control programme.

Infection control committee

An infection control committee provides a forum for multidisciplinary input and cooperation, and information sharing. This committee should include wide representation from relevant departments: e.g. management, physicians, other health care workers, clinical microbiology, pharmacy, sterilizing service, maintenance, housekeeping and training services. The committee must have a reporting relationship directly to either administration or the medical staff to promote programme visibility and effectiveness.

In an emergency (such as an outbreak), this committee must be able to meet promptly. It has the following tasks:

- To review and approve a yearly programme of activity for surveillance and prevention;
- to review epidemiological surveillance data and identify areas for intervention;
- to assess and promote improved practice at all levels of the health facility;
- to ensure appropriate staff training in infection control and safety management, provision of safety materials such as personal protective equipment and products; and
- training of health workers.

The infection control programme will be effective so long as it is comprehensive and includes surveillance and prevention activities, as well as staff training. There must also be effective support at national and regional levels.

The infection control committee is responsible for the development of policies for the prevention and control of infection and to oversee the implementation of the infection control programme. It should:

- be composed of representatives of various units within the hospital that have roles to play (medical, nursing, engineering, house keeping, administrative, pharmacy, sterilizing service and microbiology departments);
- elect one member of the committee as the chairperson (who should have direct access to the head of the hospital administration);
- appoint an infection control practitioner (health care worker trained in the principles and practices of infection control, e.g. a physician, microbiologist or registered nurse) as secretary.
- meet regularly (ideally monthly but not less than three times a year).
- develop its own infection control manual/s; and
- monitor and evaluate the performance of the infection control programme.

Infection control team

The infection control team is responsible for the day-to-day activities of the infection control programme. Health care establishments must have access

to specialists in infection control, epidemiology, and infectious disease, including physicians and infection control practitioners.

In some countries, these professionals are specialized teams working for a hospital or a group of health care establishments; they may be administratively part of another unit (e.g. a microbiology laboratory, medical or nursing administration, public health services). The optimal structure will vary with the type, needs, and resources of the facility.

The reporting structure must, however, ensure the infection control team has appropriate authority to manage an effective infection control programme. In large facilities, this will usually mean a direct reporting relationship with senior administration. The infection control team or individual is responsible for the day-to-day functions of infection control, as well as preparing the yearly work plan for review by the infection control committee and administration.

These teams or individuals have a scientific and technical support role, e.g. surveillance and research, developing and assessing policies and practical supervision, evaluation of material and products, the overseeing of sterilization and disinfection, ensuring the sound management of medical waste and the implementation of training programmes. They should also support and participate in research and assessment programmes at the national and international levels.

The infection control team should:

- Consist of at least an infection control practitioner who should be trained for the purpose;
- carry out the surveillance programme;
- develop and disseminate infection control policies;
- monitor and manage critical incidents;
- coordinate and conduct training activities.

Infection control manual

A hospital-associated infection prevention manual containing instructions and practices for patient care is an important tool. The manual should be developed and updated by the infection control team and reviewed and approved by the committee. It must be made readily available for health care workers, and updated in a timely fashion.



Education and training of health care staff

Health administrators should be oriented towards the importance of the infection control programme.

Health care workers should be equipped with requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes for good infection control practices.

The infection control team should:

- Assess training needs of the staff and provide required training through awareness programmes, in-service education and on-the-job training;
- organize regular training programmes for the staff for essential infection control practices that are appropriate to their job description;
- provide periodic re-training or orientation of staff; and review the impact of training.