

Organisational Governance: Accountability for Health Care Associated Infections **King's PSSQ project summary**

Superbug rates in hospitals have become part of the national psyche. Media reports about lethal C difficile or MRSA outbreaks have alerted the public to healthcare-associated infections (HCAIs) and the safety of hospital patients. High-profile cases where patients have been harmed and even died have damaged the health service, both financially and in terms of reputation. Consequently, many central government NHS safety initiatives have focused on reducing HCAIs.

Good governance - particularly accountability - is considered fundamental to reducing HCAIs in hospitals. Yet there is scant evidence showing what role governance and accountability play in controlling hospital infections.

We have carried out research at a London NHS Foundation Trust to identify formal and informal systems of accountability aimed at reducing HCAI rates, to see both how they contribute to the safety of patients and how accountability can be improved.

We have discovered that external governance, such as government targets for reducing the number of cases of MRSA and C difficile, is having an influence on infection rates. We also found that many workers are not aware of specific targets or regulations. However, the Trust is successful in communicating the importance of hygiene and controlling infections, starting at the high-level committees that examine HCAI cases and decide what action is needed and feeding down to staff on the wards.

We have found that in order to minimise HCAIs a hospital must:-

- Comply with external standards and regulations;
- Implement infection control standards and procedures at a divisional level, and have systems for feeding information from senior and board level down to the divisions;
- Collect good quality infection control data. If managers do not have an up-to-date picture of how staff are behaving and where infections are occurring, they will be unable to act effectively to reduce infection rates;
- Train staff at all levels and keep them updated. Awareness of the dangers of HCAIs and how to prevent them as well as a knowledge of organisational standards help staff to take steps to reduce infection.
- Ensure that staff follow good hygiene procedures and have in place policies for supporting good behaviour and dealing with non-compliance.

"This research has the potential to clarify key areas of responsibility, lines of authority and accountability arrangements for prevention and infection control in the hospital. This will be really helpful in order to keep driving down infection rates." - Deputy Director of Infection Prevention and Control, participating London NHS Foundation Trust.

Next steps:-

- We will be looking at whether infection control data and internal audits reflect what is actually going on: for example, whether staff are washing their hands before treating each patient;
- Suggesting how a hospital may both support infection-control role models, who lead by example, and influence the behavior of 'repeat offenders'.