

Preventing Hospital-Acquired Infections: Best Nursing Practices

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Introduction

Hospital-Acquired Infections (HAIs), also known as nosocomial infections, represent a significant challenge to patient safety and healthcare quality worldwide. These infections, which develop 48 hours or more after hospital admission, contribute to increased morbidity, prolonged hospital stays, higher healthcare costs, and, in severe cases, mortality. Nurses play a pivotal role in preventing HAIs, as they are at the frontline of patient care and are responsible for maintaining infection control practices throughout the hospital setting. By adhering to evidence-based protocols, implementing preventive strategies and promoting patient and family education, nurses can significantly reduce the risk of HAIs and enhance overall healthcare outcomes. Effective prevention requires a combination of rigorous hand hygiene, aseptic techniques, environmental cleaning, surveillance and ongoing professional education [1].

Description

Hand hygiene is the cornerstone of preventing hospital-acquired infections and is one of the most effective interventions that nurses can implement. Proper handwashing with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizers before and after patient contact, after contact with bodily fluids and following removal of gloves is essential. Nurses must adhere to the "Five Moments for Hand Hygiene" framework, which emphasizes performing hand hygiene at critical points during patient care. Education, reminders and monitoring of hand hygiene compliance are crucial for maintaining high standards and reducing transmission of pathogens within healthcare facilities [2]. Aseptic and sterile techniques are essential nursing practices that minimize infection risk during invasive procedures.

Nurses performing tasks such as intravenous catheter insertion, urinary catheterization, wound care and surgical dressing changes must strictly follow aseptic protocols. Proper use of Personal Protective Equipment

(PPE), sterilization of instruments and maintenance of a sterile field prevent contamination and subsequent infection. Adherence to these practices is critical, especially in high-risk areas such as Intensive Care Units (ICUs), operating rooms and oncology wards, where patients are more susceptible to HAIs. Environmental hygiene and infection control measures are also key components in preventing HAIs. Nurses collaborate with environmental services to ensure that patient care areas, equipment and high-touch surfaces are cleaned and disinfected regularly. Proper disposal of medical waste, including sharps and contaminated materials, reduces the risk of pathogen spread. In addition, nurses must ensure that equipment such as stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs and thermometers are disinfected between patients. Maintaining a clean and safe environment not only prevents HAIs but also promotes overall patient safety and confidence in the healthcare system.

Surveillance and early detection of potential infections are essential nursing responsibilities. Nurses monitor patients for signs and symptoms of infection, such as fever, redness, swelling, discharge, or changes in vital signs. Timely recognition and reporting of abnormal findings enable early intervention, reducing the severity of infections and preventing transmission to other patients. Documentation of infection indicators and adherence to hospital reporting protocols facilitate the tracking of infection trends and the implementation of targeted prevention strategies. Education and training are integral to sustaining best nursing practices for HAI prevention. Ongoing professional development programs ensure that nurses remain current with the latest evidence-based guidelines, emerging pathogens and infection control techniques. Simulation-based training, workshops and in-service education reinforce the importance of hand hygiene, aseptic techniques and environmental cleaning. Educating nursing staff on emerging threats such as Multidrug-Resistant Organisms (MDROs) fosters vigilance and preparedness, reducing the risk of HAIs in healthcare settings [1].

Patient and family education is equally important in HAI prevention. Nurses provide guidance on hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, wound care and proper use of medical devices such as catheters or drains. Educated patients and families are more likely to adhere to infection prevention measures, recognize early signs of infection and promptly report concerns. This collaborative approach enhances infection control efforts, empowers patients and strengthens the overall safety culture within healthcare facilities. Implementation of bundle care strategies is another effective nursing intervention in HAI prevention. Care bundles are structured sets of evidence-based practices aimed at reducing specific infections, such as Central Line-Associated Bloodstream Infections (CLABSI), Catheter-Associated Urinary Tract Infections (CAUTI) and Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia (VAP). Nurses ensure strict adherence to bundle protocols, including hand hygiene, proper catheter insertion and maintenance, daily assessment of device necessity and timely removal of invasive devices. Consistent application of these interventions has been shown to significantly reduce infection rates and improve patient outcomes [2].

Conclusion

Preventing hospital-acquired infections is a fundamental responsibility of nursing practice and is critical to patient safety, quality of care and healthcare outcomes. Through rigorous hand hygiene, adherence to aseptic techniques, environmental cleaning, vigilant monitoring, patient and family education and implementation of evidence-based care bundles, nurses significantly reduce the incidence of HAIs.

Ongoing professional development, interdisciplinary collaboration, use of technology and antimicrobial stewardship further strengthen infection prevention efforts. By addressing challenges such as staffing limitations and emerging pathogens, nurses ensure that infection control strategies remain effective and sustainable. Ultimately, the proactive role of nurses in preventing hospital-acquired infections safeguards patients, improves recovery and enhances the overall quality of healthcare delivery, underscoring the essential contribution of nursing to safe and effective patient care.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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