



WEBINAR SESSION 7 (MARCH 2019) – SUMMARY

The Role of Cleaners: Neglected Frontline WASH workers in Healthcare Facilities

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Purpose of this Webinar

The role of cleaners in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in healthcare facilities (HCF) is often overlooked. WASH in healthcare facilities can influence the quality of maternal and newborn care by affecting patient safety and infection prevention and control (IPC). Presenters from the Soapbox Collaborative explain their voyage of discovery of the neglected role of these frontline WASH workers. They further explain needs assessments carried out in seven different countries using checklist, visual inspections and microbiology as well as the resulting training program for cleaners, the Teach Clean Package.

Summary of Presentation

Context

- WASH and quality of care overlap in HCF and can affect maternal and newborn health.
- Three-fourths of deliveries are now occurring in healthcare facilities and the proportion is increasing.
- In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) HCF are crowded, patients are kept in open bays and antibiotic use is high. In low-income countries HCF also tend to have more patients than beds, few infection control staff, and family members take on the role of care attendants. These factors make it difficult to maintain hygiene in HCF in LMICs.
- Transmission of bacteria can happen through surfaces, hands, equipment and air.
- In LMICs the risk of healthcare-associated infection is 2-3 times higher for patients in intensive-care units than in high income countries (HICs).
- The risk of healthcare-associated infections in the neonatal population is 3-20 times higher in LMICs than in HICs.

Needs Assessment

- Needs assessments were conducted in HCF where mothers and babies receive care in seven countries using checklist, visual inspections and microbiology to identify points of hygiene failure.
- Clusters of *Staphylococcus aureus* (Staph) were identified at the feet of hospital beds, placing neonates and mothers who experience labor-related tears at risk of infection.

- Sources of contamination were thought to be from midwives placing their hands there during delivery and the occurrence of patients' bare feet.
- Investigators found that floors were also hotspots for Staph. Cleaning solutions were found to be diluted and mops were found to contain and spread Staph in HCF.

The TEACH CLEAN Package

- The TEACH CLEAN Package is a freely available resource for organizations who want to improve the knowledge and practices for those who clean. It is tailored for use in low-resource settings.
- The TEACH CLEAN Package aims to present the information and tools necessary to equip trainers to deliver comprehensive training to staff who clean and to provide an overview of how training materials can be adapted to the local country context.
- The package outlines the importance of participatory learning, provides examples of relevant participatory training methods, and provides information on supportive supervision and quality improvement in environmental hygiene to support sustained improvement.
- The TEACH CLEAN Package contains five documents: 1) Instruction Document, 2) The Clean Boxes Document, 3) Cleaning Procedure Guidelines, 4) Illustrated Cleaning Procedure Guidelines and 5) Competency Assessment Checklists.
- The first pilot of TEACH CLEAN occurred in Gambia in 2016 in collaboration with the Horizons Trust Gambia (HTG) and the Ministry of Health. The pilot led to capacity strengthening, the enhancement of IPC knowledge and practice for both trainers and trained cleaning staff, the empowerment of cleaners and the integration of training into the broader IPC program supported by HTG.

Opportunities on a Global Scale

- HCF in LMIC settings face challenges to preventing hospital-acquired infections such as inadequate WASH infrastructure and non-existent IPC programs.
- Evidence shows that IPC education that involves frontline health care workers in a practical, hands-on approach and incorporates individual experiences is associated with decreased hospital-acquired infections and increased hand hygiene compliance.
- At the HCF level, education should be in place for all healthcare workers using participatory methods and training to reduce the risk of hospital-acquired infections.
- At the national level, IPC programs should support education and training of the health workforce as a core function.

Unanswered Questions from the Discussion

- Chandrakant Ruparelia: Thanks for this wonderful presentation. Given that availability of water is a big issue at the health facilities what measures are being proposed to address

the challenges to make sure that all facilities have access to enough water as per the recommended standards.

A: WHO and UNICEF are leading the facilitation of WASH in its entirety and we look forward to forthcoming documents and approaches to help address aspects like water requirements to support the implementation of TEACH CLEAN.

- Jacob Nkwan Gobte: Excellent presentation. What is appropriate terminology, "Cleaners or House Keepers", are they involved in the facility design. For example, lack of free taps for them is a design problem which can be solved if they are involved in reviewing plans

A: Staff responsible for cleaning activities can be referred to as cleaners, domestic service workers, environmental services staff, domestic assistants, orderlies, house keepers, ayas, ward boys, laundresses etc. depending on roles and responsibilities and country context.

Infrastructure and system change are essential elements for sustainable IPC and environmental hygiene improvements and ensuring that staff who clean have access to appropriate equipment, supplies and an environment that is designed and planned to facilitate best practice is so important. Evidence gathered to date suggests cleaning staff have little input into facility design in low-resource settings, but we agree there would be a significant benefit in engaging with this cadre.

- Jacob Nkwan Gobte: I agree that cleaners are not well valued as members of the health care team. What is the recruitment procedure?

A: Strengthening workforce recruitment and retention are key elements of the multi-faceted approach which is critical to creating a safer healthcare environment. TEACH CLEAN training is one part of the approach needed to support workforce development and it can be the first step in empowering health facilities to value cleaning more.

- Christine Moe: Thank you for a very interesting presentation! In our research, we often saw that healthcare facilities contract the cleaning work to outside companies. Do you see this? Does this change how the training is conducted and who is responsible for training?

A: The TEACH CLEAN package is intended for use by any organization or individual(s) with a background in IPC and/ or environmental hygiene and we suggest the creation of a steering group to bring together key stakeholders to oversee all stages of the training – from adaptation to implementation. The steering group may be at a national, regional, district or facility level depending on the local context. We know that contractors are common in many countries and this is certainly something Soapbox has encountered. The standards set in WHO and CDC documents apply to all, even contracted staff, and the TEACH CLEAN package also makes this clear.

Summary of Action Items

- Improve awareness of the issues surrounding WASH in HCF.

- Address the challenge with evidence-based solutions.
- Implement IPC education for all healthcare workers.
- Incorporate education and training of the health workforce as a core function of national IPC programs.