

Survey Reveals Majority of Americans Do Not Ask Medical Professionals About Hand Hygiene

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Kimberly-Clark announces results of a new survey on patient attitudes toward hand hygiene in a healthcare setting. According to the study results, 72 percent of respondents have never asked healthcare providers if they have washed or sanitized their hands before beginning an exam or procedure.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hand hygiene is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of infections. Approximately 1.7 million hospital patients contract an HAI each year in the U.S. That means one in 20 individuals walking into a facility will become infected while seeking help for a medical concern. HAIs cost more Americans their lives than breast cancer and HIV/AIDS combined, accounting for nearly 99,000 deaths. Many of these infections are preventable.

Conducted by ORC International (ORC) on behalf of Kimberly-Clark, the survey examined the hand hygiene perceptions and behaviors of 1,020 respondents. Key findings include:

- Patients do not ask about hand hygiene: Only 5 percent of the survey respondents always ask doctors or staff in hospitals if they have washed or sanitized their hands before beginning an exam or procedure.

- Low awareness of risk: Among Americans who did not ask healthcare professionals about hand hygiene in the hospital setting, 40 percent said they did not ask because they assume healthcare professionals perform hand hygiene before treating any patient. In addition, 34 percent said they simply don't think about asking a hospital healthcare provider about hand hygiene, and 21 percent said that they do not feel it is their responsibility to ask. Only 30 percent did not ask because they witnessed their hospital healthcare provider washing or sanitizing their hands.

- Older patients are more hesitant to ask: Nearly 25 percent of Americans age 55 and older are not at all comfortable asking hospital doctors or medical staff whether they washed their hands, compared to 12 percent of those ages 18-34 who felt uncomfortable.

- Patients are not offered education: Only 8 percent of those surveyed were provided with pamphlets or literature in hospitals outlining proper hand washing techniques and other infection prevention tips. Further, only 5 percent were provided information in hospitals on mobile or online resources specific to preventing HAIs.

"Patients and their visitors can and must become aware of the simple steps that can help reduce exposure to HAIs, such as asking providers about whether or not they've washed their hands," says Victoria Nahum, executive director of the Safe Care Campaign. "Having personally experienced the devastating effects of HAIs, I know the critical role that patient education can play in preventing infections and saving lives."

"The evolution of HAI surveillance and reimbursement, coupled with the recognition that many HAIs are preventable, has caused healthcare facilities to further emphasize the importance of consistently implementing evidence-based prevention methods, such as hand hygiene, to reduce the incidence of infections," says William R. Jarvis, MD, president of Jason and Jarvis Associates, LLC. "Educating patients and their loved ones allows them to serve as safety advocates, taking an active role in their care by helping to ensure that HAI prevention is the business of all clinicians."

To empower patients and visitors with information on infection prevention, Kimberly-Clark's HAI Patient Education Program includes a toolkit, support for community events and information on mandatory reporting and infection prevention for patients and their families at www.preventinfections.com.

As part of this patient education initiative, Kimberly-Clark and Safe Care Campaign recently launched a Quick Response (QR) Code program that provides hospitals and healthcare facilities with a free QR code-enabled poster

with access to nine educational video vignettes related to common patient safety issues.

"Hospitals and other healthcare facilities are challenged to safeguard patients from infections, but reducing and preventing HAIs is really everyone's responsibility," says Wava Truscott, PhD, MBA, director of scientific affairs and clinical education for Kimberly-Clark. "The results of this survey are compelling and underscore the need for greater patient awareness and education in preventing the spread of HAIs. Kimberly-Clark is committed to providing both consumers and clinicians with the information they need to help reduce the spread of infections in the healthcare setting."

This survey was conducted online in the U.S. by ORC International on behalf of Kimberly-Clark from May 31 to June 3, 2012 among 1,020 U.S. adults. Results were weighted for age, sex, education, geographic region and race where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the U.S. population.