

Hand Hygiene Campaign Switzerland

Switzerland boosts hand hygiene compliance in health care by 25% in only 4 months

SwissNOSO, the national infection control group, reported today that the results of their multi-strategy campaign to promote hand hygiene in health care show a significant improvement in hand hygiene compliance nationwide after only a short period.

Launched on 26 January 2006, the campaign was implemented in 116 hospitals, representing 20,000 patient beds nationwide. During 4 months, over 40,000 moments for hand hygiene were observed and measured according to a stringent method at baseline. Results show that overall hand hygiene compliance has increased from 54% to 68% - a 25% boost in patient safety.

Nurses' compliance level remains high and is 72% on average. Moreover, physicians' adherence to hand hygiene – a problem in every hospital worldwide – even shows an increase of 33% to an encouraging 60%.

Campaign director, Dr Hugo Sax said: "This is promising - we might even catch up with nurses soon!"

One of the cornerstones of the campaign is the availability of alcohol-based hand rubs at the patient bedside or carried by staff in their pocket. Recourse to hand rubbing now accounts for up to 97% of all hand hygiene actions in Swiss hospitals.

Hand hygiene improvement is a key factor to combat healthcare-associated infection that currently affects approximately 10% of acute admissions to hospital in most developed countries. In Switzerland, this represents around 70,000 patients with additional costs of CHF 240 million to the healthcare system.

In the Swiss hospitals where infection rates were monitored in parallel, the impact of hand hygiene improvement was dramatic, with estimates of 17,000 infections averted and projected cost savings equivalent to CHF 60 million nationwide.

But there is still a long way to go. Good hand hygiene should be a matter of routine but is still forgotten half of the time by staff immediately before touching a patient.

Dr Sax said: "In Switzerland, we will target a zero tolerance policy in the long run. However, this is only possible when alcohol-based hand rub is at every point of care, when all healthcare workers understand the danger of unclean hands, and when chief executives support and help sustain this new culture wholeheartedly."

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