EDITORIAL

Collaborating for Safer Healthcare:
The WHO Private Organizations for Patient Safety (POPS) Platform

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A time for change

Health care today is increasingly divided. It is divided between countries with resources who continue to spend more and more on health care and those without who are unable to ensure even basic safety and quality standards. It is divided between the professional community that is becoming increasingly specialized and the patients they serve who continue to be seen as passive recipients. It is divided between an innovative, but fractured, private sector and a public sector tasked with the stewardship of safety, but lacking the means to reach all parts of the world.

Largely to respond to this environment, the World Health Organization in collaboration with the WHO Collaborating Centre on Patient Safety at the University of Geneva Hospitals, Geneva, Switzerland, has established a protected web based platform to improve safety and reduce health care-associated infections (HCAI). This platform, named WHO Private Organizations for Patient Safety (POPS) platform, will allow WHO and participating companies (that is: companies involved in developing, manufacturing, and/or distributing products for hand hygiene) to share information, and is aimed at aligning such companies’ promotional messages for hand hygiene products with WHO recommendations, enhancing the quality of hand hygiene products, and encourage product availability and accessibility in all parts of the world. The long term aim of the collaboration, which currently includes 15 companies from around the world, is to improve implementation of WHO recommendations in different parts of the world, especially in countries with limited resources.

1 http://www.who.int/gpsc/pops/en/index.html
The core function of Clean Care is Safer Care (CCiSC), a programme of the WHO Patient Safety Department, is to promote activities to ensure appropriate hand hygiene at point of care in all health-care facilities and in all parts of the world to reduce the burden of HCAI. Hand hygiene should be performed at specific moments (indications), either by handwashing with soap and water, or by handrubbing with an alcohol-based formulation. WHO recommends alcohol-based handrub (ABHR) as the easiest and most effective method for hand hygiene performance during routine health-care delivery.

There are several hurdles to achieving this seemingly simple intervention. Two main problems are: (i) lack of awareness of the importance of hand hygiene at different levels, such as policy makers, administrators of health-care facilities and health-care workers; and (ii) the lack of resources to enable best practices.

WHO has seen that these two hurdles could be reduced by working with companies with an interest in hand hygiene related products to improve their implementation of WHO recommendations.

The goal of the collaboration is to benefit patients, and not the participants in the platform. The expected public health benefit from working with industry will be a reduction in HCAIs through improvements in hand hygiene.

Specifically, working with industry will provide opportunities to:

1. promote alignment of messages for hand hygiene product promotion in health-care facilities, with WHO recommendations on this topic
2. provide information and WHO recommended criteria aimed at improving the quality of hand hygiene products
3. encourage product availability and accessibility in all parts of the world
4. encourage ethical promotion of hand hygiene products with HCAI prevention as the primary goal
5. capitalize on the corporate social responsibility, encourage and facilitate support for infrastructure and educational development projects in low income countries especially least developed countries
6. promote support for hand hygiene product availability and accessibility in times of emergency/crisis situations - for example by encouraging the inclusion of ABHR in emergency kits for surgery, wound care, delivery etc
7. promote a better understanding of global product availability based on - for example - data.
The future of global health

The past era of major public health efforts were characterized by major investments from governments and other donors to establish organizations and efforts like The Global Fund for the Elimination of Tuberculosis, HIV AIDS and Malaria, GAVI and UNAIDS. The impact of these organizations on global public health has been enormous. However, the days of massive public funding to eliminate the major health threats of our time is over. If WHO and its Member States are to continue their fight to improve safety and quality of health care globally, new approaches will need to be found. It is in this spirit that WHO has created the POPS platform.

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