

Q&A on Environmental Cleaning Practices/CBC Marketplace

Friday, February 1, 2013

On Friday, February 1st, 2013, **CBC Marketplace** will air a follow up to their March 2012 segment focusing on cleaning and superbugs in hospitals. As part of this follow up, CBC shared with Dr. Kevin Smith, President & CEO of St. Joseph's Health System, video footage of a handrail that in the vast majority of areas tested, hidden camera footage showed that our environment had been properly cleaned. In one instance, it appears that a handrail was not properly cleaned within a 24-hour period.

In response to that interview, we have developed a list of questions and answers that clearly articulate the facts about our cleaning practices at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton.

Q. *Is poor cleaning to blame for the recent C. difficile outbreaks at St. Joseph's?*

A. The most *C. difficile* event at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton was actually a cluster of cases, not a facility-wide outbreak. The hospital conducted an extensive review of the event, including DNA typing, and discovered that there were more than nine (9) different strains of *C. difficile* identified among the infected patients. This makes it highly unlikely that environmental cleaning practices were responsible for the high number of cases experienced during this event.

There are a number of factors that can contribute to the spread of *C. difficile* in a hospital. These factors include:

ANTIBIOTIC USE - Superbugs are more prevalent today because of our use of stronger antibiotics. These antibiotics create the environment in the body where superbugs thrive. *C. difficile* has become stronger than our antibiotics, and therefore takes over in the digestive systems of people who are treated with these antibiotics. Most cases of *C. difficile* are frail, elderly people who are being treated with an antibiotic to save their life.

HAND HYGIENE, ISOLATION PRACTICES and PROPER USE OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT - Hand hygiene is the number one way healthcare workers and patients and visitors can prevent the spread of *C. difficile*. If a patient is vulnerable to *C. difficile* because they are on an antibiotic, hand washing by visitors and healthcare workers is all the more important.

CLEANING PRACTICES: Cleaning is also essential to fighting *C. difficile* in hospitals. *C. difficile* spores are very difficult to kill so many hospitals are now starting to use bleach-based cleaning products to kill spores.

Q. *What is the scope of SJHH Housekeeping resources?*

A. St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton's Environmental Services team includes approximately **272** staff who support housekeeping for **165,595 square metres** across our three Campuses. We emphasize 'risk assessment' in our approach to housekeeping. In other words, we emphasize priority cleaning for high-risk environments such as inpatient rooms, clinical areas and areas with high-touch points such as bed rails, and over-bed tables.

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Q. *The CBC indicates that hospitals have reduced services in housekeeping by as much as 15% in the last decade. Is this the case at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton?*

A. St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton has done just the opposite. We have made significant investments in our housekeeping program and **we are now investing more than we have ever spent in our history in this core service.** We now spend approximately **\$12.5 million** annually on environmental services. As a comparator, the industry benchmark for spending in housekeeping is approximately **\$65.34/sq. metre.** **St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton exceeds this media, spending \$74.90/square metre to keep our hospital clean.**

Q. *What are the cleaning standards at St. Joe's?*

A. Consistent with the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC) standards, our priority for cleaning is first to patient care areas, then public areas followed by administrative areas. Patient care areas include patient rooms, ERs, exam and treatment rooms, outpatient areas, etc. Public areas include corridors, lobbies, and waiting rooms. Administrative areas include office space.

Inpatient units and patient rooms are cleaned daily this includes high touch points such as hand rails, surfaces, and bed tables. Rooms where a patient is placed in isolation precautions are cleaned twice daily as part of our standard practices. Following the discharge of a patient, a terminal clean of the room is completed. During any infectious outbreak, our cleaning processes are enhanced to include more frequent cleaning of contact points.

Our infection control standards are more rigorous than ever before, far exceeding our industries expectations. We clean our hospital as thoroughly as possible, with the most powerful agents available.

Q. *Does St. Joe's contract out its housekeeping services?*

A. Our Housekeeping team is made up of both hospital and contracted our employees who participate in the same training , use the same cleaning techniques and follow the same PIDAC standards across our organization.

Q. *What kind of training do St. Joe's Housekeeping staff receive?*

A. Our Housekeeping staff receives ongoing training in PIDAC standards and best practices as well as training in PIDAC-recommended cleaning products such as sporicidal agents and bleach. Training is led by Environmental Services management and our Infection Prevention & Control experts.

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Q. *What kind of quality assurance processes does St. Joe's have in place?*

A. On-going auditing and performance measurement are central to our quality assurance focus in environmental services. The following is a summary of the four auditing tools we have in place to measure quality and our performance in these areas. These audits are conducted by both environmental services and infection prevention & control experts. :

Visual Audits: In the last year, the Environmental Services Supervisory team has conducted 2,160 visual audits across each campus with a 90% satisfaction rate. These audits are unannounced and focus on detection of visible unclean surfaces.

ATP Audits: SJHH ATP audits are used to validate surface cleanliness as this process detects the presence of live organisms on surfaces. In the last year, the Environmental Services Supervisory team has conducted more than 2,000 ATP Tests with >90% showing a 'pass' rate.

Outbreak Audits: During an infectious disease outbreak, housekeeping supervisors conduct patient satisfaction interviews. In the last year, we have completed 487 interviews with 94% satisfaction.

Q. *How will St. Joe's continue to measure overall outcomes and processes?*

A. The greatest measure of our performance is our outcomes. St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton has made the reduction of hospital acquired infections its first priority. This is identified in our corporate Quality Improvement Plan. Our **annual rates of Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus [MRSA], Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococcus [VRE], Central Line Associated Bloodstream Infections [CLA-BSI] and Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia [VAP] are all below the established provincial benchmark.** While our current annual rate of C. difficile sits above benchmark, we have made significant reductions year-over-year. We also perform above the provincial benchmark in overall Hand Hygiene Compliance. A detailed summary of this information is available in the *Accountability, Quality & Performance* section of our website.

Q. *What can our community do to help reduce the spread of infection at St. Joe's?*

A. We ask that all visitors practice proper hand hygiene, which means washing your hands when entering or leaving our facilities, upon entering or leaving a patient room, and after touching any surface including railings, door handles, and elevator buttons.

Visitors should also self-screen for illness, and should not visit the hospital if they are unwell.

We ask that our visitors let us know if an area needs to be cleaned. There are signs in our hallways about how to contact hospital cleaning services or you can speak directly with one of our staff members.

In cases where a patient is in isolation due to an infectious disease, visitors may be asked to wear a gown and gloves when visiting, in addition to washing their hands on entering and leaving.