

Infection control and prevention in Homes for the Elderly- Half Day Seminar

Date: 02nd August 2016

The Healthcare Standards Directorate held a half day seminar 02nd August 2016 at Mount Carmel training center for both Public and Private Homes for the Elderly in Malta and Gozo. The main audience were home managers and employees of the homes.



The aim of this initiative was to ensure safe, high quality care within all the homes and serve as a networking opportunity for home managers. Infections have been associated with high rates of morbidity and mortality, hospitalization, extended hospital stay and substantial healthcare expenses. Emerging infections and antibiotic-resistant organisms in an institutional environment where the population is older, frailer and sicker, create unique challenges for infection control.

There are several considerations in approaching prevention of infections in the long-term care facility. Patients are institutionalized because they have significant chronic comorbid illnesses and impaired functional status. In general, the extent of comorbidity and level of functional impairment are also associated with the risk of infection or colonization with resistant organisms.

Most elderly residents of long-term care facilities have the long-term care facility as their permanent domicile. The intensity of efforts to prevent transmission of infection between residents who are in their home environment requires a balanced approach. Isolation or limitations in activity and mobility cannot be justified unless there is evidence that a given resident is a risk to others and that barriers that may restrict socialization will decrease that risk.

The changing demographics in developed countries with increasing numbers of elderly residents warrants continued resources directed toward resolving problems of infection control in long-term care facilities.

The main issues discussed during the seminar related infection control included:

- Best practices for cleaning and disinfection
- Dealing with outbreaks
- Proper use of gloves and disposable aprons
- Needle stick injuries
- Proper use of detergents and disinfectants
- MRSA



The seminar was introduced by the Director for Healthcare Standard, Ms Patricia Galea and the main speaker was Mr. Mark Bonanno, Infection Control Nurse.

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

MRSA is a bacterium that can cause infections in various parts of the body. It is more difficult to treat than most other strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* because it is resistant to some widely used antibiotics. The spread of MRSA and other resistant strains of bacteria is of great concern to health experts due to the difficulty and expense of treating the infections they cause.

Symptoms of MRSA will vary according to the site of infection. In most cases it causes superficial skin infections such as sores and boils. However, it can also cause more serious

deeper skin infections, surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, respiratory infections and infections of the the urinary system.

Staphylococcus aureus bacteria are very common and can live on the body surface of human beings without causing infections. In fact, one third of people have staphylococcal bacteria in their noses. Such 'carriage' of staphylococcal bacteria can become problematic if the bacteria manage to get into the body, such as through a cut or breach in the skin, and cause infections. Such infections can usually be treated with antibiotics, but over the years some strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* became resistant to the antibiotics that were commonly used to treat it such as methicillin, amoxicillin, penicillin and oxacillin.

MRSA can be spread by contact with other people who carry the resistant strain or by touching objects contaminated with the resistant bacteria. MRSA is more likely to cause infections in people with weak immune systems and in high risk settings such as hospitals, nursing homes and other healthcare centres. This is one reason why consistent infection control measures are crucial in elderly homes, as they can help to limit spread of such resistant bacteria and avoid serious infections and mortality in home residents.