Too Shy to Ask for a Wash and Dry?
Angela Hewlett, MD, MS
Feb 25, 2013

Do Patients Feel Comfortable Asking Healthcare Workers to Wash Their Hands?
Ottum A, Sethi AK, Jacobs EA, Zerbel S, Gaines ME, Saferd N

_Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol._ 2012;33:1282-1284

Survey Summary

Can we rely on patients to request handwashing compliance from their caregivers? The answer is probably "no," according to this survey conducted by Ottum and colleagues and published in the December 2012 issue of _Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology_. Two hundred patients who were identified as being at risk for various healthcare-associated infections were surveyed to measure patient awareness of these infections. The survey also included several questions about hand hygiene.

Almost all of the survey respondents (99.5%) agreed that healthcare workers are supposed to wash their hands before and after caring for patients. Similarly, 90.5% of respondents felt that they should remind healthcare workers to wash their hands. However, only 64% of patients surveyed reported that they would feel comfortable asking their nurses to wash their hands, and only 54% felt comfortable asking their doctors to wash their hands. Only 14% of patients reported having ever asked a nurse or doctor to wash his or her hands in the past.

Viewpoint

Empowering patients to assist in the hand hygiene compliance of healthcare workers sounds like an excellent idea. However, this survey indicates that although it is almost universally accepted that healthcare workers should wash their hands, patients do not necessarily feel comfortable asking them to do so. The study is limited by the small sample size and single center, but the findings highlight that patient-centered hand hygiene campaigns may need to focus on making patients feel comfortable asking their caregivers to wash their hands, instead of merely emphasizing the importance of performing hand hygiene.

Abstract

© 2013 WebMD, LLC

Cite this article: Too Shy to Ask for a Wash and Dry? _Medscape_. Feb 25, 2013.