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Hand hygiene: Visitor practices in the acute care setting

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Healthcare associated infections (HAIs) affect millions of patients annually and increase their risks of morbidity and mortality. Vulnerable populations such as oncology patients, who have compromised immune systems, are at greater risk of not only acquiring infections, but also overcoming infections. Hand hygiene is the simplest and most effective infection prevention intervention to break the chain of infection. The purpose of this study was to determine hand hygiene behaviors among hospital visitors. This was a descriptive, observational study to investigate visitor hand hygiene practices prior to entry and exit from patients rooms, including what method of hand hygiene (handwashing or alcohol hand rub) is used. There were 461 observed opportunities for hand hygiene. Total combined observations for hand hygiene behavior were handwashing 1(0.2%), alcohol hand sanitizer 19 (4.1%) and none 404 (87.6%). Unknown hand hygiene behavior accounted for 37 (8%) of the total observations. Thirty-one patients were cared for during the observation period, with a total of 98 visitors entering the unit. On average, each patient had 3 visitors during the 12-hours of observation. The limitations of the study include the single 12-hour observational period, limited comparative research on this topic, and the descriptive design. In general, studies have reviewed healthcare worker hand hygiene practices, but visitor hand hygiene behavior is understudied. Further research and investigation into hospital visitor hand hygiene behaviors is needed to improve hand hygiene practices and reduce infection risks to patients.

Biography

Ashley Kahl MSN, RN is a registered nurse with primary experience in medical surgical nursing and clinical professor for Mennonite School of Nursing at Illinois State University. She recently graduated with her Masters in Nursing Science from Millikin University in May 2014. During her graduate studies, Ashley became interested in infection prevention and control focusing on the role of hospital visitors. This interest lead her to develop and conduct a research study that observed hand hygiene behaviors of hospital visitors. She is eager to share her research finds and looks forward to conducting further research in this area in the future.

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