



Healthy Hands, Healthy Facility

A provider does more than reduce influenza rates with a hand-sanitizing program that is implemented by residents.

EVEN BEFORE THE THREAT OF H1N1 in 2008, approximately 266,000 people were hospitalized each year due to influenza, while 36,000 die annually from this virulent disease. Many of those stricken were people who were frail or immune-compromised and living in situations where they were more easily exposed to viruses.

A long term care facility is just such a place: Residents are in frequent contact with others, because they share rooms and dining areas. An additional concern is that long term care residents usually receive their personal care from nurses who are mothers and who are therefore in daily contact with children coming from very infectious situations—schools. Every parent is aware of how quickly flu and colds can spread throughout classrooms. Encouraging hand-washing in schools, at home, and in long term care facilities can close down this “infection highway” and improve public health in the process.

In response to these considerations, Signature HealthCARE, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., recently implemented a unique program in several of its nursing facilities that will soon be expanded to all 66 facilities across seven states.

Simple Idea, Big Impact

The idea for Operation Healthy Hands came from an observation by Signature HealthCARE’s Chief Medical Officer Dennis Stone, MD, during a vacation.

He realized that the cruise ship industry was attacking the norovirus issue not just by having hand disinfection dispensers placed at the entrance to the



Residents and staff at Washington Rehabilitation and Nursing Center received an award for its Operation Healthy Hands program.

dining areas, but also by having personnel assigned to encourage each person passing to utilize it.

The key was encouragement.

Many studies have shown that even in hospitals the rate of voluntary hand disinfecting is embarrassingly low. People need a “nudge,” Stone realized. How better to deliver this nudge than to “deputize” the elders who often sit at the door watching visitors and staff come and go.

In order to test the concept, Washington Rehabilitation and Nursing Center, Chipley, Fla., implemented Operation Healthy Hands during the 2008 flu season. Happily, the facility experienced zero flu incidents during that entire season.

Nosocomial infection rates were also reduced by 50 percent once the

facility implemented the program. The underlying basis for Operation Healthy Hands is to vigorously promote good hand hygiene to visitors, employees, and residents by empowering facility residents to encourage the regular use of hand sanitizers located at the entrances to their facilities.

Every hand washing or sanitizing is one more act of prevention that could save someone’s life, prevent an unnecessary hospitalization, prevent staff absenteeism, or, at the very least, keep residents from feeling just plain sick.

DENNIS STONE, MD, is chief medical officer and ERICA STALEY is communications manager for Signature HealthCARE, a long term care provider with 66 facilities in seven states, based in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

Armed With Sanitizers

Volunteer residents, known as “Healthy Hands Deputies,” were provided with badges to identify and empower them. They were assigned to the various facility entrances and asked to monitor and encourage all staff, visitors, and residents to sanitize as they entered or moved throughout the building.

The visitors and staff actively cooperated with the deputies, and compliance rates were high.

People enjoyed cooperating even more because a resident was promoting the health measure, not just a sign. Secondary to the esprit d’ corp and respect experienced by the deputies was an unexpected positive outcome. The new role and status helped residents feel more useful and proactive in their home.

“I love being a Healthy Hands Deputy,” resident Fannie Mathis said.

Volunteers were recruited in a number of different ways, including posting announcements around the given facil-

ity, speaking about the program at the facility’s resident council meetings, and through resident-to-resident encouragement to participate.

Volunteers were required to be cognitively aware and able to communicate. The deputies were given a brief behavioral-based training orientation to

help them find the best way to encourage others to use the hand sanitizer.

This process created a sense of ownership and purpose. A core group remained consistently committed to their new roles.

Operation Healthy Hands is a simple, easily administered program

Tips For Implementing A Healthy Hands Campaign

Get residents involved in helping to boost hand-washing frequency and cut down on transmission of the flu virus in facilities.

- Appoint several residents to act as Volunteer Deputy Monitors and give them “sheriff” badges to identify their roles.

- Post the monitors where they usually spend time, near the various entrances, and elsewhere inside the facility.

- Ask monitors to observe and encourage staff and visitors to clean hands at sanitizing dispensers as they enter and move around the building.

Source: Influenza in Long-term Care Facilities: Tools to Help Manage This Threat, Roche Laboratories, 2009.

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that can increase the health and quality of resident and caregiver life at minimal cost.

The hand sanitizers used were standard to the facility; the sanitizing lotion was also the stock brand already

available. Aside from the hand sanitizer expense, the only other costs were for the purchase of badges provided to the deputies and staff time needed to organize and support the program.

The gains are obvious—reduced illness leads to reduced hospitalizations, reduced medication costs, and reduced staff absenteeism.

Influenza Outbreak Control Checklist

Tips for managing an influenza outbreak in a facility and preventing it from spreading include:

- Continue to actively monitor resident and staff illness.
- Re-offer vaccination to any staff or residents not yet vaccinated.
- Keep residents with confirmed and suspected influenza together and away from other residents.
- Restrict staff movement among units and floors.
- Ensure resident rooms and common areas are cleaned more frequently.

- Educate residents on hand hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Notify the state department of health.
- Notify family members and receiving facilities of the outbreak.
- Ensure enough masks, gloves, and gowns are available.
- Consider asking visitors to wear masks and gloves.
- Consider visitor restrictions, and keep local media informed.

Source: Influenza in Long-term Care Facilities: Tools to Help Manage This Threat, Roche Laboratories, 2009

National Recognition

Due to the positive impact of the program, Operation Healthy Hands has gained national attention. On July 23, 2009, Washington Rehabilitation and Nursing Center was awarded the Making a Heartfelt Difference award from the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists (ASCP) Foundation. The award was given to the facility and the five resident volunteers who participated in an educational video about the Operation Healthy Hands program.



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The honorees were Brian Trinko, Ezell Johnson, Fannie Mathis, William Lewis, Robert Alexander, and the

team at Washington Rehabilitation and Nursing Center.

“We implemented Healthy Hands

to help prevent the spread of infection,” said William Blank, Washington Rehabilitation and Nursing Center’s administrator.

“But the great thing about it is that we wound up with a quality of life program that also helped prevent the spread of all infections. Our Healthy Hands resident volunteers take away a real sense of purpose and fulfillment from their role in keeping their home safe.”

“We spend so much time trying to care and cure, we can forget the basics—like preventing illness to begin with,” says Stone. “Operation Healthy Hands works on so many positive levels, and there is no down side.” ■

National Toolkit Available

Operation Healthy Hands is now part of a larger initiative known as the Influenza in Long-term Care Facilities toolkit, a collaborative effort among long term care industry experts Dennis Stone, MD, Karen McDonald, RN, senior vice president for Fundamental Clinical Consulting, and Maude Babington, PharmD, partner with Babington Consulting, staff from the ASCP Foundation, and Roche Laboratories.

One of the key goals of the project was to help implement the Centers for Disease Control and Preven-

tion’s “Take 3 Campaign” and thus help nursing facilities move beyond just vaccinations by improving good hygiene practices and appropriate use of antiviral medications. Operation Healthy Hands was a great way to implement Step 2 of the campaign, which called for taking preventive measures.

Thanks to a grant from Roche, the toolkit is being distributed across the country, free of charge, through the ASCP Foundation, nursing facilities, pharmacies, and primary care providers.

For More Information

■ Contact Erica Staley at estaley@signaturehealthcarellc.com.

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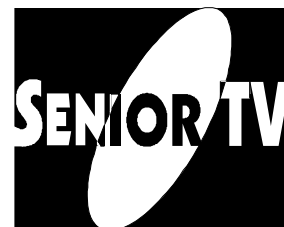
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