

# What's the environment got to do with it?

By A.C. Burke, MA, CIC

Preventing the spread of infections in nursing centers and other health care facilities requires prevention practices to implement together as a "prevention bundle." It is well known that performing proper hand hygiene in accordance with national guidelines, such as those from the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a key component to a prevention bundle, but did you know that the resident care environment can contribute to the spread of infections? Many organisms that cause health care-associated infections can survive in the environment for extended periods of time (e.g. days, weeks, months). Surfaces in the resident care environment can become contaminated via hands of health care workers and residents, as well as from droplets due to respiratory infections landing on surfaces. When residents and health care workers come in contact with contaminated surfaces and then touch their face (e.g. eyes, nose, mouth, mucous membranes), there is opportunity to become sick.

Taking action to support that the resident care environment does not contribute to the spread of infections requires the proper use of appropriate cleaning and disinfection products and equipment. High-touch surfaces in the immediate resident/patient environment need to be cleaned and disinfected more often than non-high-touch surfaces. Isolation rooms need to be cleaned and disinfected at least daily. When isolation precautions are discontinued, resident rooms need to be terminally cleaned, including the removal and laundering of privacy curtains. It is also important to ensure staff, both resident care staff and housekeeping staff, know who is responsible for cleaning equipment and other items used in resident rooms.

There are many new technologies on the market to support environmental cleaning and disinfection practices and processes, such as ultraviolet light, hydrogen vapor, and air-filtration systems. The efficacy of disinfection products and equipment requires that they are used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. For example, take note of the appropriate concentration and the amount of time surfaces are to remain wet with disinfection product (i.e. wipes). Also note that cleaning the resident room is still required prior to using ultraviolet light systems.

Additional components to your prevention bundle may vary based on services provided in your nursing center. Key components of a core prevention bundle include but are not limited to: standard precautions including hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and injection safety; transmission-based precautions including resident co-horting and dedicating equipment; environmental cleaning and disinfection including shared equipment; minimizing the use of devices; antibiotic stewardship; and intra-facility and inter-facility communication of infection status for patient transfers. Implementing prevention bundles

or best practices together is the best way to prevent the spread of infections and ensure the best quality of care for your residents. ♦



*Dr. Ismael Roque, CEO of Hospice Care of South Florida, and provider of FHCA Service Corp member Novaerus speaks with health care professionals in Miami-Dade County about the mitigation of infection control via the portable Novaerus units for all his patients.*



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