

Cairo, 1 May, 2013 - On the occasion of World Hand Hygiene Day on 5 May 2013, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is calling on all countries in the Region to improve and promote best hand hygiene practices during the delivery of health care services.

The theme of this year’s campaign is “Save lives: Clean Your Hands”. The campaign aims to reduce the spread of life-threatening infections through improving hand hygiene practices in health care settings. Hand hygiene is a primary and simple, low-cost measure which is proven to be effective in preventing health care-associated infections.

Every year, health care-associated infections affect hundreds of millions of patients worldwide, in both developed and developing countries. They can lead to serious illness, prolonged hospital stays, long-term disabilities, added costs to patients and their families, additional financial burden on the health care system and, critically, sometimes, tragic loss of life.

Patient voices can act as a powerful tool in achieving improvements in patient safety, and their participation is needed to improve and promote hand hygiene. WHO is encouraging patients to insist on their right to safe health care, of which hand hygiene is a basic component.

Health care managers have a responsibility to facilitate hand hygiene through ensuring: availability of soap, running water and alcohol-based handrub, a standard sink/bed ratio, continuous training of staff, regular monitoring of hand hygiene practices and patient satisfaction.

In order to encourage the participation of all countries in improving and promoting the best hand hygiene practices of care providers; WHO has published a web site for all health care facilities to register in the global movement and gain access to a wide range of practical tools and guidelines and to benefit from the experiences of others. The web site is available at: <http://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/register/en/index.html>.

In addition, health care facilities can make use of WHO’s Hand Hygiene Self-Assessment Framework to assess and improve their hand hygiene practices.

As of 8 April 2013, 1199 health facilities, located in 22 countries of the Eastern Mediterranean

Region, had joined this global movement and expressed their commitment to improving hand hygiene. WHO will be working with ministries of health to encourage public and private health care facilities to register and become part of the global initiative.

WHO’s vision for the next decade is to encourage awareness and promote the need for improved compliance and sustainability in hand hygiene practices at the point of patient care through implementation of WHO’s 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene initiative: i) before patient contact; ii) before cleaning/aseptic procedure; iii) after body fluid exposure risk; (iv) after patient contact; and v) after contact with patient surroundings.

We can all work towards improving the safety of patients in health care settings through the implementation of essential measures, such as hand hygiene, not only to reduce the number of health care-associated infections but for the long-term benefit of patients and care providers and to ensure greater community satisfaction with health care services.

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