

INTERVIEW

Hand hygiene worldwide

Interview with Prof. Didier Pittet¹, performed by Fernando Bellissimo-Rodrigues²

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1) Question: What is your main motivation for promoting hand hygiene worldwide?

Answer: Since the beginning the beginning of what we call western medicine, Hippocrates already manifested his concern about the unintended harmful effects of clinical practice: "Primum non nocere", which means, "First, do no harm". Around 2,500 years later, we are still facing the same dilemma, estimating that approximately 16 million individuals die each year in the world from health-care associated infections. And we know that most of these infections are transmitted through healthcare workers' hands, due to the lack of proper and timely hand hygiene. Hand hygiene remains the most efficient method to prevent infections. That is my motivation: to save those people lives.

2) Question: What are the main challenges for implementing the WHO "My 5 Moments" approach worldwide?

Answer: The "5 Moments" concept was developed to help healthcare workers memorizing the main indications for hand hygiene in their clinical practice. However, we have first to provide adequate conditions for them to comply with hand hygiene. It is not possible to expect a nurse working in an intensive care unit to wash her/his hands 30 times per hour to reach 100% compliance with the "5 Moments". So, availability of alcohol-based handrub either at the point-of-care (ie. at each hospital bedside) and/or in each healthcare worker pocket is a key for hand hygiene compliance improvement.

That is one of the huge challenges we have been facing worldwide, especially in developing countries. For overcoming this issue, we developed a "Guide to Local Production of WHO-recommended Handrub Formulations", made freely available from the WHO website (<http://www.who.int/gpsc/tools/faqs/abhr1/en/>) and largely used in Latin America, Africa, and Asia for promoting hand hygiene in healthcare settings.

3) Question: What do we need to do in Brazil for improving hand hygiene compliance?

Answer: During the program "Train the Trainers in Hand Hygiene" (held in Rio de Janeiro last February with the support of Aesculap Academia), it became obvious to me that one great obstacle for hand hygiene promotion in Brazil is the wide use of powdered gloves, which precludes hands to be rubbed and demands hand to be washed. We demonstrated 20 years ago that

optimal compliance with handwashing is not possible to obtain in healthcare settings, due mainly to time constraint and skin side effects. So, in my opinion, the ABIH should work close with ANVISA to gradually replace powdered gloves for non-powdered gloves in all healthcare settings, to optimize opportunities for handrubbing, thereby facilitating adherence to better hand hygiene practices.

Apart from removing this obstacle, we recommend all Brazilian hospitals to address the "Guide to Implementation of the WHO Multimodal Hand Hygiene Improvement Strategy" (http://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/Guide_to_Implementation.pdf), which has been validated and shown to be effective across a wide range of facilities in different countries, continents and cultures (http://www.who.int/gpsc/national_campaigns/country_list/en/). Even considering the continental dimension of Brazil, with a large diversity of cultures and backgrounds, we have observed very successful stories about hand hygiene promotion in this country, through the Hand Hygiene Excellence Award for Latin America (<http://www.hhea.info/>). So, it means that it is possible to have good hand hygiene practices here in Brasil, and the "Guide" is the best way to accomplish it.

4) Question: What are your expectations regarding Brazilian hospitals?

Answer: From my perspective, Brazil has a great potential. As a country, you have reached a social and economical development that makes possible for you to search for excellence. And that certainly applies to healthcare settings and to hand hygiene promotion in particular. With the support of ANVISA, ABIH, and all regional infection control associations, you can make an unprecedented progress in promoting patient safety in this country. To accomplish that, you have to work close to each other, in a coordinated manner. I also hope institutions in Brasil will experiment the Hand Sanitizing Relay experience, and some possibly to the level of setting a new GUINNESS WORLD RECORD (see tinyurl.com/HHRelay).

5) Question: How do you feel after the worldwide success of the "Clean Care is Safer Care" WHO campaign?

Answer: It is an ambiguous feeling that comprises the happiness of realizing how many lives we have helped to save worldwide through the promotion of safer care, and the consciousness that we still have much to do. It is our mission and we will never stop.