

Template Letter to Communicate Hand Hygiene Initiatives to Managers

Introduction

This document provides a template letter to aid a local Hand Hygiene Co-ordinator or person(s) interested in introducing or reinvigorating hand hygiene improvement initiatives within a health-care facility in communicating important messages to key senior managers/leaders.

For health-care facilities at the early stages of planning and initiating a hand hygiene improvement strategy, it is recommended that senior managers/leaders are made aware of the initiatives available to improve hand hygiene. It is critically important that clear messages concerning the improvement initiatives are conveyed and that it is explicitly stated where action is required and by whom.

Within each health-care facility, titles of the key senior managers/leaders may be different, but roles are likely to include:

- Hospital director/CEO
- Senior medical officers
- Senior doctors
- Senior nurses/ heads of nursing/matrons/chief nurses
- Other senior professional heads

Whether the final communication that is prepared as per the model letter detailed overleaf is distributed by letter, email or word of mouth should be determined by the individual health-care facility.

This is a sample letter. Thus, where appropriate, local information can be inserted or the text modified to reflect local style.

<insert name of health-care facility>
<insert address line 1>
< insert address line 2>
< insert address line 3>
< insert address line 4>

<insert date>

Dear <insert name>

This health-care facility is currently involved in the preparation stage of an initiative to tackle health care-associated infection (HCAI), focusing on hand hygiene improvement. By doing so, we aim to become part of a major global effort led by WHO. We are preparing to implement WHO Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Health Care (2009) by following a detailed action plan and utilizing a toolkit which has been made available as part of the **SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands** WHO Patient Safety Initiative.

<Insert name of health-care facility> is already attempting / has in the past attempted <amend as appropriate> to address safety / infection control through <insert any examples of recent attempts>. The planned **SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands** initiative builds on this good work, making us part of a global network of health-care facilities taking action on HCAI.

The immediate focus on hand hygiene involves putting into action an evidence-based, multimodal hand hygiene improvement strategy. This is in acknowledgement of the global evidence that hand hygiene is integrally linked to the transmission of infection, but that compliance with hand hygiene recommendations by health-care workers is universally low with compliance as low as 8% in some international studies.

In brief, the improvement strategy is concerned with:

- Increasing compliance of hand hygiene from our current baseline (<insert compliance rates if known>) so that more health-care workers clean their hands more often and at the right moments
- Changing the system, so that it is possible to clean hands at the point of care¹, using antiseptic (alcohol-based) handrubs
- Provision of an accessible and safe water supply, with soap and towels available to health-care workers in clinical areas
- A combination of other measures designed to influence health-care worker behaviour and including the support of senior managers/leaders for hand hygiene and infection control

The burden of clinical disease attributable to HCAI in <insert name of facility> is <insert any data from hospital infection registers, prevalence studies in the facility or from national studies, or state “unknown at the present time”>. However, in developed countries, rates range from 5–15% and can affect 10–40% of patients admitted to intensive care units. In developing countries, data is limited, but some studies show that up to 19% of patients have an HCAI at any one time². HCAI is clearly a major patient safety problem.

WHO have developed the “My 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene” approach, to simplify training and measurement of compliance, and enhance promotion of the times when hand hygiene needs to be applied. A visual outline of the “My 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene” approach is attached to this letter. The “My 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene” approach encourages health-care workers to clean their hands (1) before touching a patient, (2) before clean/aseptic procedures, (3) after body fluid exposure risk, (4) after touching a patient, and (5) after touching patient surroundings.

All health-care workers, including senior managers, should be aware of the "My 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene" approach.

Improving hand hygiene in our health-care facility will save lives, unnecessary suffering, and money.

Without the support of senior and influential managers such as yourself, the hand hygiene improvement initiative is at high risk of failure. Your support in promoting the improvement across the entire health-care facility and to the teams with which you work is critical to success.

In particular, your support and participation with the following activities is requested:

- Discuss the improvement initiatives at high-level organizational, team or department meetings
- Promote the importance of hand hygiene in face to face discussions with health-care workers
- Act as a good role model. Hand hygiene behaviour of junior health-care workers is strongly influenced by senior members of the team and senior managers
- In the capacity of role model, being aware of and demonstrating the "My 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene" approach

We welcome your comments and feedback on all of the planned initiatives and thank you for your continuing support.

Further information will be provided in due course. In the meantime, if you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact **<insert name of key contact at the facility>** or visit WHO Patient Safety website at www.who.int/gpsc/5may/en/.

Yours sincerely

<add name>

<add title / position>

¹**Definition of point of care:** The place where three elements come together: the patient, the health-care worker, and care or treatment involving contact with the patient or his/her surroundings (within the patient zone). The concept embraces the need to perform hand hygiene at recommended moments exactly where care delivery takes place. This requires that a hand hygiene product, e.g. alcohol-based handrub, if available, will be easily accessible and as close as possible (within arms reach), where patient care or treatment is taking place. Point-of-care products should be accessible without having to leave the patient zone.

Availability of alcohol-based handrubs at the point of care is usually achieved through staff-carried handrubs (pocket bottles), wall-mounted dispensers, containers affixed to the patient's bed or bedside table or to dressing or medicine trolleys that are taken into the point of care.

²WHO Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Health Care (2009).