

Tips for implementing a successful patient participation programme

1. Ensure that a multimodal hand hygiene improvement strategy is in place in your institution.

A multimodal programme will be the foundation for your patient participation programme. Your patient participation programme will not be effective if the basic elements to enable hand hygiene best practices are not in place, i.e. alcohol-based handrub available at the point of care, health-care workers (HCWs) education and practice monitoring, reminders. In addition, you need to be aware that involving patients may take time to implement, because it implies a cultural change in the institution to create the conditions for patient empowerment/participation. Thus, the timeframe identified for this first step should be realistic and will provide an easy transition for support from your health-care workers.

2. Obtain strong support from your institution's leadership and key stakeholders.

It is important that patient community leaders and consumers as well as decision-makers are involved in the planning of your programme. This will enable you to overcome some of the barriers you may face with your staff as you introduce patient participation.

3. Reassure HCWs about the goals of the patient participation programme.

Patient participation /empowerment should only be considered once full buy-in and education of HCWs has been secured. This is vital to your programme since one of the key steps in patient empowerment is the need for HCWs to give explicit permission to patients to participate.

If you encounter barriers from your HCWs, frame the HCWs' component of the campaign around the fact that they could also benefit from a patient participation programme. In order to do this, ask yourself "how could HCWs benefit from this programme, and how can I convince HCWs that it will benefit them and their work?" The references at the end of these tips will give you some of the answers.

4. Convince patients that they can be involved in hand hygiene promotion.

Patients are unlikely to participate if they believe that their involvement is not welcome. Hence, you must ensure, when designing the patients' arm of the promotion campaign, that patients know they are encouraged to provide input. For example, it can be proposed to HCWs to wear badges inviting patients to ask about HH, and a video about patient participation can be presented to every patient upon hospitalization. Many resources are available at no cost.

5. Identify champions to support the patient participation programme in your institution.

The role of champions has been shown to be essential to the success of hand hygiene improvement campaigns. Champions must represent different health-care delivery roles. Champions, identified among HCWs and leaders, will be supportive of empowering patients and assisting with HCWs' acceptance of patient participation. Remember, champions can also be identified within patient organizations which might be operating within the institution. Champions can help build on the successes and support actions to overcome barriers at your institution.

6. Pilot Test the Programme.

Choose one or two pilot wards carefully, because the success of piloting is crucial to subsequent hospital-wide implementation. Choose a unit(s) in which its leaders are supportive and innovative and its professionals see patient safety as a priority. Successfully implementing such a programme in one or two pilot wards will help convince and serve as a good example for the rest of your staff.

7. Measure the success of your Programme.

Data are very powerful instruments that can help rally individuals who are not entirely sold on the concept of patient participation. Ensure that you measure the impact of your programme, disseminate the results to your staff and provide an opportunity for feedback from your staff and patients on their perception of the programme and its impact on hand hygiene compliance.

In the following papers, you can find highlights and good examples of patient participation programmes. These look at implementation as well as an overview of barriers, solutions and strategies for both HCWs and patient participation/empowerment.

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