

## Difäm Health Community (DHC )

### Podcast: Layout of a health-care facility

Hello and welcome to the Difäm Health Community. My name is XXX and today I am talking to XXX. Last week we talked about a key element to ensure the proper disposal of medical waste: incineration. In today's podcast, we are going to look at another important aspect in order to implement effective infection prevention and control programmes and to ensure a resilient institution: bed occupancy and the appropriate layout of a health care facility.

Very important, indeed; let us start on the patient wards. Wherever sick people share a small space, infections can spread very quickly. Therefore there is one golden rule that should always be followed: at all times there should be only one patient per bed. Moreover one meter distance between the beds should be guaranteed. Patient wards should never be crowded places.

Okay, in principle this seems doable, but how do you deal with situations where patients cannot be alone, such as on the children's ward?

Good point. Especially with children, a supervising person is often needed and wanted. In the best case it should always be the same person and should stay in the room with the patient. As you can imagine if for example the mother of a child with an infectious disease keeps walking around the health care facility or even goes home to work or to cook for the family, infections can spread very quickly in both directions. The patients can infect their family and the visitors can become infected at home or at work and then bring the disease into the health care facility during their next visit and so transmit the infection to patients and health care workers: a vicious circle!

The same also applies to visitors. In general, you must take into account: the more people in a small space, the faster diseases can spread. Nevertheless, visitors often play an important part in the health care facility because they can give emotional support to a patient and often also take part in the care of a patient. When relatives help feeding or washing a patient it makes work easier for the health care workers. But of course, close contact to a sick person always increases the risk of infection for the visitor.

Yes, I can imagine that this is not ideal. What can we do to reduce this risk?

We can do several things. First of all it is important to consider the amount of visitors. Patients with infectious diseases should have as little visitors as possible and they should be documented at the health care facility. This can help to trace the chain of infections in case of a sudden spread of disease. Another aspect we need to take into account is where visitors can stay when they are not on the patient wards. Especially visitors who travel a long way to the health care facility need an appropriate waiting and recreation area. Ideally, visitors can stay in a room with good ventilation, preferably outside and at some distance to the patient wards. The waiting area should have seats to reduce the possibility of crowding. Finally it is important to teach visitors the right behaviour when

dealing with a sick person. Visitors that are involved in direct care should also have access to gloves, masks and disinfectants.

Okay, so visitors should be registered, stay in designated areas separate from the wards when they are not involved in direct patient care and know about infection control. But I guess there is more to consider when it comes to reducing the spread of infections in a health care facility.

Exactly. Let us take a closer look at the patient wards again, or more exactly at the cupboards, boxes and shelves where patients can store their personal belongings. In the context of infection prevention it is important that these boxes, cabinets etc. should never be shared between patients. We also have to talk about what is in the boxes. They are there for clothes or other personal belongings of the patients. But sometimes they are used to store food. As you can imagine, food stored in a container or in a cupboard in a health care facility for weeks is not a good idea when you try to prevent infections from spreading. If you have these food storage boxes for patients in your facility, make sure to check them daily for possible hazards. Since staff coverage is often small, it might be advisable to not introduce food storage boxes at all. Clothes and personal things can be stored in open shelves. This makes it easier to check the items regularly and they pose no potential health hazards like rotten food does.

Yes, I see; so no shared cupboards and no food in boxes. What else do we need to think about?

The cupboards and boxes are only one part of the patient wards. Let us talk about the general ward layout. The exact storage position of items on the ward can have a large impact on the effectiveness of infection prevention measures. Let us take a closer look how we can design the rooms in a way that helps reduce the risk of infection. In every room there should be a disinfectant dispenser, for example at the door, so that health care workers can disinfect before and after caring for a patient. As you know many infections spread through the germs on our hands, therefore it is very important that patients, visitors and health care workers always have access to clean sanitary facilities like clean water, soap and disinfectant. Toilets should also be clean and easily accessible for patients, preferably in every room. If that is not possible, you should at least separate potential infectious patients from others in separated rooms with their own sanitary facilities. There should be separate toilets for men and women and it should be possible to dispose of menstrual hygiene products properly.

Okay, separate toilets, sanitary facilities and disinfectant on site. That makes sense.

Exactly. But not only toilets and sanitary facilities should be separate. A clear division between patient areas, visitor areas and work areas is also very important in order to reduce infections and secure a safe working space for health care workers. Workers and visitors should have their own sanitary facilities and disinfectant dispensers. I know that this is sometimes difficult to implement. If there are no separate facilities available, there should at least be stalls and sinks with soap and disinfectant reserved for visitors or health care workers separately.

You always have to try and make the best you can!

Right you are! Finally we must think about the placement of trash bins. As you learned in our last podcasts, we need different bins and storing possibilities for different kinds of waste. Especially containers for infectious waste and sharps should always be kept away from patients and visitors. Even though they are kept in designated and safe containers there should be no contact with people possible. These containers can for example be placed behind the facility, where trained staff then take further steps necessary for their disposal. The place where waste is stored should also be inaccessible to outsiders, especially children.

Okay, I have learned a lot today. It shows that there is a lot to remember not only for me; I can imagine that it is hard for the staff in a health care facility to mind every step we have just been talking about. How can we make sure that patients, visitors and staff can remember all this?

Good point! This is an aspect that is very important to include in the layout of a health care facility. Wherever infection prevention must be practiced, people need to keep all this in mind. In daily practice, this might take the form of posters in the toilets, for example, which show how to wash your hands properly. You can also print our info sheets on cleaning and disinfecting and put them up in the cleaning area. Posters also work in visitor areas to remind people of appropriate behaviour when in contact with a sick person, hand hygiene or the handling of food in the health care facility.

Okay, let me sum up the most important things we have been talking about today. Only one person per bed with at least one meter distance to the next bed. Boxes and cupboards should never be shared or used for food. The number of visitors should be limited especially with potential infectious patients. Visitors should always have access to adequate PPE as well as separate sanitary facilities and waiting areas. The facility needs to be equipped with clean water, soap and disinfectant, as well as posters which remind everybody how to behave in a health care facility. Anything else?

No, I think that is all for today! The more aspects you consider, the better.

I hope you enjoyed today's podcast and got a good overview of the adequate layout of health care facilities. Until our next podcast, stay safe and be blessed!

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