

Difäm Health Community (DHC)

Podcast: Infection prevention and control

As of May 2023

Hello everyone, my name is XXX, I am a member of the Difäm health community and I welcome you to today's podcast.

Last week we started with hand hygiene because it was World Hand Hygiene Day. Hand hygiene is a partial aspect, although a very important one, of the vital topic of infection prevention and control, in short IPC. I am here today with my colleague, xxx.

XXX, can you briefly explain the other aspects of IPC?

Hello and welcome. Yes, of course, and I will start right away. IPC is a topic that received a real boost in COVID times. It has been on the priority list for quite a long time but only during pandemics or epidemics will the importance of IPC become clear to everyone. The World Health Organization (WHO) names several areas of infection prevention and control (IPC) that are essential for preventing and controlling the spread of infections.

Proper hand hygiene is the most important measure to prevent the spread of infections. WHO recommends hand hygiene practices, including handwashing with soap and water or the use of alcohol-based hand rubs. We have already covered this aspect in a podcast. If you missed it, you will find it on our website www.difaem-community.de where you can download both, the audio and the text as PDF; or just listen to it again in the WhatsApp group.

To avoid getting bored, I suggest that we take turns introducing the individual IPC areas, especially since you know as much about this topic as I do. So let us move on to the next one.

This is okay with me. The second area is the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). PPE is essential in preventing the transmission of infections from patients to healthcare workers and vice versa. PPE includes gloves, gowns, masks, and eye protection. We have become very aware of the significance of PPE during COVID times and one can say that the availability of PPE has become much better even in low-resource settings in the last two years. Let us hope it stays like this.

Yes, do let us hope so! I do not want to go back to the times of glove shortage... The next area of IPC is environmental cleaning and disinfection. Proper cleaning and disinfection of

the environment, of the medical equipment and surfaces are crucial to prevent the spread of infections. This aspect is very often underrated because staff like janitors, cleaners and housekeepers do it without receiving a special training. However, there is no doubt about the vital importance of clean surroundings and equipment and it is equally important to appreciate the job of those who care for it; and of course, it is the responsibility of everyone to do their part for a clean working environment. However, let me underline that it is extremely important to train hospital support staff on proper and hygienic cleaning.

The next but not last area we look at more closely is the sterilization and disinfection of medical equipment. Medical equipment must be properly sterilized or disinfected to prevent the transmission of infections. This requires diligence as well as well-maintained and functional equipment.

Safe injection practices is our next aspect of IPC. Unsafe injection practices can lead to the transmission of infections, including HIV and Hepatitis B and C. This is crucial, as unsafe injection practices and the improper use of sharps can directly pass on infections.

The consequences are mostly severe and life-threatening diseases like HIV and Hepatitis. WHO provides a number of guidelines for safe injection practices.

The next area concerns the management of healthcare waste. Proper disposal of healthcare waste is essential for preventing the spread of infections. Moreover, of course, there is a connection with this and the topic discussed before. Especially for injection tools, safe disposal and proper healthcare waste management is indispensable. Mind you, it is not enough to throw waste in the correct bin: that is only the beginning of it.

Then there are the facility related issues like bed capacity and staffing. Too many patients in too small rooms make it easy for germs to spread from patient to patient. Too little staff leads to negligence in IPC procedures because the staff does not have enough time to do their work properly and for the complete safety of all.

There is the saying: Been there, seen that. Overworked and overburdened staff is not helpful and will eventually make mistakes. Therefore, it is an important factor of IPC to have working conditions and workloads that make proper IPC possible.

I think we have covered the most important areas of IPC. Let me quickly summarize them: We talked about hand hygiene, PPE, waste management, sterilization and disinfection of medical equipment, safe injection practices, safe disposal of sharps and other infectious and potentially dangerous medical waste and, lastly, about appropriate bed and staff numbers to prevent a too strenuous work environment that does not allow good IPC.

Beyond that, there are some closely related aspects that I would like to cover as well because they are closely linked to infection prevention and control.

The first of them is water, sanitation and hygiene, also known as WASH. In summary, IPC and WASH are interconnected and require a coordinated approach in order to prevent and control the spread of infections effectively. Access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene products are essential for the effective implementation of IPC measures, especially in resource-limited settings.

There is still another question closely linked to IPC: Antimicrobial Stewardship, in short AMS. The appropriate use of antibiotics is essential to prevent the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and IPC measures can help to reduce the need for antibiotics. The combination of effective IPC measures and the appropriate use of antibiotics can improve patient outcomes as hospital-acquired infections as well as antibiotic-resistant bacteria pose a significant threat not only to patient health but also to public health.

Okay, all together, there are nine fields of immediate interventions in order to practice perfect infection prevention and control. We have already dealt with one of them in more detail: handwashing. To give you an idea, this means there are eight more podcasts on specific IPC topics, which will follow.

This series will reach beyond the area of responsibility of clinicians because it also involves nursing and other medical personnel as well as support staff. However, it is important to deal with IPC comprehensively. There are so many people and squads involved in proper IPC and everyone one is needed at their place. Perhaps you will find IPC a field of interest after this series and want to become engaged in the IPC team at your facility or even serve as focal person. That would be great!

Yes, I can only support that! We would really appreciate any effort in improving IPC at facility level. Some of the coming podcasts are a bit longer and we want to provide additional material like clips. So feel free to check it when it is posted. Maybe you can even use it in your facility!

So good-bye for today and of course we hope you will listen to us again when we cover the next topic on our quite challenging IPC list.

Until then: stay safe and stay blessed!