

# Saint Francis Gets the Upper Hand on Hygiene

When it comes to patient care at Saint Francis Hospital in Memphis, it's all hands on deck. And thanks to an ongoing hygiene initiative, those hands are not only willing and able but also compliantly clean.

As federal agencies increased the focus on healthcare-associated infections several years ago, hand hygiene came under a microscope ... quite literally. Improper, or a total lack of, hand washing can leave colonies of disease-producing bacteria on the first place that comes into contact with patients.

At the end of 2008, the Joint Commission Center for Transforming Healthcare launched its first improvement project to address failures in hand hygiene fueled by statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which estimated 1.7 million patients get a hospital-related infection annually with 99,000 dying from those infections. The good news, the organization shared, is there is a 26-45 percent reduction in HAIs with hand hygiene improvement.

The national attention and emphasis from the Tennessee Center for Patient Safety, along with a citywide movement headed up by Qsource, spurred Saint Francis to take a hard look at their policies, processes and compliance rates in hand hygiene. "Initially when we got started, our numbers were compliant but were not what they could be," said Pearlie Pilgram, RN, MS, CPHQ, director of Clinical Quality Improvement at Saint Francis. "The processes had not been refined."

Judy Baker, BS, MT, ASCP, manager of Infection Prevention for Saint Francis, added that as hospitals came together at the Healthy Memphis Common Table (now the Common Table Health Alliance) to discuss issues and report figures, it became clear that proper hand hygiene needed to be successfully addressed to lower HAIs. "That's where we really started hammering down on what we could do," she said.

Infection Preventionist Lisa Taylor, BS, MT, CLS, ASCP came on board in 2009 to oversee the project. Through the Common Table, facilities reported figures and findings that were shared with hospital CEOs and CMOs. "There was complete transparency," Taylor said. "The number one thing responsible for flipping the script was having administrative support," she continued of the importance of achieving executive-level backing.

Taylor added another key to success was finding a way to automate processes. Pilgram noted, "Everything was done manually at this time, and it was very time consuming and labor intensive." Taylor continued, "There was no way to meet the CDC guidelines because of our manual process."

Pilgram said that while there were a number of new systems coming out to track hand hygiene, many were price prohibitive. "Even the least expensive was very expensive," she said. "Then, the Joint Commission came out in 2010 with TST – Targeted Solution Tools – to help hospitals make and sustain changes." Ultimately, the hospital decided to take the best elements from the different tools in the marketplace and turned in-house to Debra Adamson and her Saint Francis technology group to create a unique system to help collect and track data.

"The tool has three sections," explained Taylor. "Who are you watching? What moment are you watching, and what did you observe?"

About this time, Taylor continued, Saint Francis moved from a 'secret shopping' strategy to overt observation. The team launched a coordinated

awareness and action campaign. A poster contest kept the message front and center and helped create buy-in to the new initiative. A video demonstrated proper technique and reminded staff members there are often multiple opportunities to wash hands during an encounter. "The World Health Organization has five moments of hand hygiene where you're expected to wash your hands," Baker noted. "We incorporated that into our policy."

Taylor said they also held a hospital-wide contest calling on the staff to help script a dialogue that would make it more comfortable to address peers and make them aware they hadn't followed proper hand hygiene procedures. "Now we have a policy in place called 'Stop the Line, recently updated to WAM! (Wait A Minute),' " Pilgram added.

Taylor continued, "If we saw an opportunity missed, someone would give you a nonverbal cue. If that didn't work, they might use a code word or have a conversation." For example, she said, the Radiology Department uses the code word 'zero' as part of their quest for zero HAIs.

While increasing awareness was critical, Baker said it was equally important to think about the barriers that could keep someone from following procedures. "We put up more hand hygiene dispensers and put them up in similar places on each floor with similar signage so people from other departments would know where they would be," she said. Baker added even that seemingly simple step was not without complications. She noted the fire marshal had to be involved

since hand rubs contain potentially flammable alcohol in the wipes. "You have to think of all the safety issues," she stressed.

Pilgram said Saint Francis has been involved since its inception with the Tennessee Hospital Association HEN, which stresses the link between measurement and improvement. "Judy and Lisa send out a monthly report on hand hygiene so everyone knows where they stand," she said. "Lisa has bird-dogged this until she has a refined process," Pilgram added with a laugh, noting Taylor's persistence in collecting observation input data and willingness to re-educate staff at every opportunity.

With the refined process, observation numbers have skyrocketed – rising from about 200 observations a month to more than a thousand. "By 2012, our observations went up to over 15,000 for the year," Baker said. "This year, we were over 8,000 for January-June."

Similarly, she continued, compliance rates have dramatically improved. "In '09, we were anywhere from the 70s to the low 90s ... our average was 83.33 ... but the numbers were very low," said Baker. "Our current rate averages about 96 percent ... which is significantly better, but it's not 100 so we still have work to do."

*The Tennessee Center for Patient Safety, a department of the Tennessee Hospital Association, develops and shares hospital and health system success stories and promotes best practices.*



**Top:** Judy Baker, Naomi Ragsdale, Pearlie Pilgram, and Lisa Taylor (L-R) take the lead in hand-washing compliance and infection prevention.

**Bottom:** Saint Francis Memphis (light purple) has surpassed the Joint Commission (burgundy) target rates since 2013.

