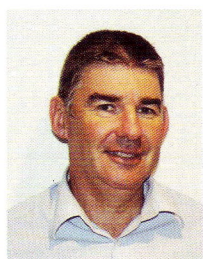


Regular cleaning of touch points is essential

Prevalence and Dangers of *C difficile* in Residential Aged Care



By Murray McDonald

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The elderly are highly susceptible to infection, and superbugs and outbreaks are of great concern in residential aged care. Residents who have been admitted to hospitals are at high risk of picking up superbugs and carrying them back and spreading them to other residents and staff.

The new strain of *Clostridium difficile* (*C difficile*) identified in 2010 is a dangerous and harmful bacteria strain, having a particularly dramatic effect on the elderly. Infection control experts are now placing high importance on advising the best ways an outbreak can be prevented in residential aged care.

The Medical Journal of Australia's Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of *Clostridium difficile* infection, state that of most concern is the recently discovered hypervirulent strain of *C. difficile*, which has been associated with high rates of transmission, severe disease and increased mortality, particularly in patients aged over 65 years.

With the elderly being the most at risk demographic, residential aged care facilities should now be on high alert.

The guidelines also acknowledge that *C. difficile* spores survive on surfaces for a long time unless methods of cleaning and disinfection that remove or kill spores are used.

Whether a residential aged care home has in-house cleaners or contract cleaners, it is essential management knows and implements the highest standard of cleaning methods for the prevention of *C. difficile* transmission.

According to the National Health and Medical Research Council, the most important form of protection from *C. difficile* infection is to wash hands well and often with soap and water. Being aware of hand touch points and the spread of disease associated with this, may seem like

simple, routine methods, but it is important facilities recognise that this is the most critical part of *C. difficile* infection control.

Increasing regular cleaning of hand touch points and focusing on locations that staff and residents are in regular contact such as staff key boards and toilet door knobs (front and back) are essential focus areas for *C. difficile* infection control.

There are 10 critical touch points in every resident's room, as well as critical touch points in bathrooms. Deep cleaning of touch points should occur particularly around the bed, bathroom and toilet area, and other areas where there is high level build up of body fluids or patient and staff contact. Equipment such as walking frames and wheelchairs are also critical locations.

In regards to *C. difficile* and the cleaning products that should be used, spores are less susceptible to chemicals, and therefore a top cleaning method is using steam and hot water.

Management needs to embrace how critical cleaning can be to resident care. If the cleaning doesn't meet infectious diseases standards they are putting their residents at risk. Using a mop and bucket in the 21st century isn't infection control best practice.

More information about *C. difficile* and infection control procedures is at the following sites:

www.nhmrc.gov.au; www.mja.com.au;

www.health.vic.gov.au



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