

Grassroots campaign, grants focus on hospital infection rates

October 29, 2006

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Should you remind your doctors to disinfect their hands before they examine you? Definitely, say local infection-control experts. Will they be offended? Possibly. But it's your health, and quite possibly your life, that's at stake.

One in 20 patients admitted to the hospital will contract an infection during their stays, and these infections are becoming increasingly severe as the deadliest germs become resistant to antibiotics.

A group of about 30 Greater Des Moines luminaries, led by Myrt Levin, have formed an advisory council that hopes to add a citizen voice - and philanthropic dollars - to the effort. To jump-start the campaign, known as Coming Clean, Tom and Mary Urban have committed to donate up to \$200,000 from their family foundation to Mercy Medical Center-Des Moines and Iowa Methodist Medical Center.

"(The hospitals) were delighted, because they're committed to it too," Tom Urban said, "and we're just glad to help." The foundation will provide dollar-for-dollar matches of up to \$50,000 per year for the next two years to each hospital, he said. Both of the hospitals have used portions of the funding to hire additional infection-control specialists.

A national health policy group with the same goals, the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths, estimates that more than 100,000 Americans die from hospital-acquired infections each year - as many deaths as from AIDS, breast cancer and auto accidents combined. Treating these infections adds an estimated \$30 billion a year to the cost of health care. RID is led by former New York lieutenant governor Betsy McCaughey, who spoke on the subject at Des Moines University in March.

Coming Clean's goals dovetail with those of the Iowa Healthcare Collaborative, a statewide organization formed by Iowa hospitals in 2004 to improve health-care quality by developing standardized best practices that are shared by the hospitals.

Among the collaborative's activities has been participation in the national "100,000 Lives" campaign, which documented more than 122,000 lives saved in American hospitals by following 30 "safe practices" that are known to reduce risks to patients. In Iowa, hospitals documented more than 1,300 lives saved through that initiative.

Dr. Tom Evans, the Iowa Healthcare Collaborative's executive director, said hospital-acquired infections have been part of its focus from the beginning. Bringing together the expertise of infection-control specialists from hospitals across the state for the past year, the collaborative has just assembled an online "toolkit" of materials health-care providers can use to improve their procedures and report their results in a standardized format.

Nearly all of Iowa's 119 hospitals will begin collecting information on hospital infections on Jan. 1, and the first six months of data will be reported next fall, Evans said.

Three areas that will be measured and emphasized by the hospitals are:

- Influenza vaccination of health-care workers. Nationally, only about 40 percent of health-care workers are immunized each year.
- Surgical site infections. The second most-common adverse event occurring in hospitalized patients; an estimated 40 to 60 percent are preventable.
- Device-related infections, such as intravenous line infections.

For more information about hospital infections, and to see 15 steps you can take to reduce your risk of getting a hospital infection, visit the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths Web site at www.hospitalinfection.org, and click on the 15 steps button.

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