

Infection Control team protects patients, employees and neighbors in the community

Christiana Care's Infection Control team tends to have a higher than usual profile once flu season begins in November.

But these diligent sentinels work year-round, usually behind-the-scenes, to protect patients, visitors and employees from exposure to many kinds of infectious diseases.

"Our mission is to provide a safe environment through surveillance and prevention and control activities," says Kathy Wroten, RN, CIC, manager of Infection Control. The team is responsible for monitoring disease and microbiology data to detect significant trends and transmission patterns, particularly in departments identified as high risk/volume areas. Specific activities include the daily review of all positive culture results, admission sheets, ED triage logs and clinical records and to make appropriate recommendations.

"Normal surveillance means looking at all areas of our hospitals and the transitional care facility for opportunities to prevent transmission, using the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines," Wroten says. Educating staff and families about preventing disease from spreading is another high priority.

High-tech surveillance

Infection Control heightens surveillance when necessary, such as during the flu season, which typically runs from November through May. An automated data mining system known as SafetySurveillor provides a high-tech tool to enhance the team's efforts. The software manages and tracks infections by providing alerts, analysis and reports via automatic data collections and analytical routines, which integrate data collected throughout the health care system. "Christiana Care is one of the few health care systems in the country that uses this kind of high technology," Wroten says.

SafetySurveillor helps Infection Control monitor throughout the flu season according to programmed specifications and then sorts out all of the data to be analyzed. "In this way, we're able to see the exact number of influenza cases as they're occurring," says Wroten. The influenza information is sent to the Delaware Division of Public Health, which then produces information in the form of charts and graphs that indicate when flu begins and how it progresses statewide.

Comparing trends

Year-round, the department conducts syndromic surveillance, a systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data related to clinical syndromes that can significantly impact public health. "We look for trends and report numbers to Public Health daily to help determine if there are any outbreaks," says Wroten. "We can then compare our trends with the state's and share the information with Christiana Care's management and staff," says Wroten.

"This is especially helpful to Nursing and the Bed Board for deciding when they'll need to staff up and need more beds as cases start to peak," she says. Wroten hopes last year's flu season statistics indicate that more people are being vaccinated, as awareness about the flu and the importance of vaccines has increased throughout the community.

Infection control education

Providing education is an important component of Infection Control's mission.

Education is provided internally and externally, particularly about timely issues such as flu season and Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA).

“Providing educational materials and guidance are one of the ways we maintain a strong community relationship,” says Wroten. During this year’s National Infection Control Week (Oct. 15-19), the department focused on MRSA – a bacterium that is resistant to certain antibiotics including methicillin, oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin. Although MRSA occurs most frequently among individuals in hospitals and other health care facilities, community-associated MRSA (CA-MRSA), which occurs in otherwise healthy people who haven’t been hospitalized, has become a major concern in the past year.

“We spent the week educating Christiana Care employees about CA-MRSA,” says Wroten. “Recently, there have been articles in the national and local press about individuals on high school sports teams contacting this organism. We’ve been receiving a lot of calls from area schools, asking us how they can keep their athletic equipment and facilities clean.”

Staff roles and responsibilities

The Infection Control Department includes 10 full-time and one part-time employee. The full-time staff includes RNs, certified by the Board of Infection Control, who address infection issues in all locations. Tasked with minimizing infection risk, staff collaborates with Christiana and Wilmington hospitals, as well as the Riverside transitional care facility. In addition, employees serve as consultants to satellite locations, including the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center, private physicians’ offices, Infusion Services and the Visiting Nurse Association.

The department’s ever-increasing role extends beyond the health care setting, as staff looks at infection in the community and becomes involved in local and national projects and in monitoring compliance with local, state and federal regulations. Also, the team is part of Christiana Care’s Emergency Management Committee and has helped develop policies relating to national and international concerns such as pandemic flu and bio-terrorism preparation. ●

HEALTH OBSERVANCES AND RECOGNITION DAYS – NOVEMBER

Month long

National Alzheimer’s Disease Month
Diabetic Eye Disease Month
Epilepsy Awareness Month
Family Caregivers Month
National Home Care Month
National Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month

Week long

Allied Health Professions Week, 4-10
National Diabetes Education Week, 4-10
National Health Information and Technology Week, 4-10
Medical Staff Services Week, 5-11
Radiologic Technology Week, 5-11
Perioperative Nurse Week, 12-18

Recognition Days/Events

Prematurity Awareness Day, 1

Source: American Hospital Association