eht
executive housekeeping today
The official publication of IEHA - Uniting Facility Managers Worldwide
October 2012
www.ieha.org

Caring for a Nation
Ronnie Hendrickson, CEH
Clinic Caretaker Supervisor at Cherokee Nation W. W. Hastings Hospital

Preventing the Hotel-Associated Infection

by John Scherberger

A challenge for those in the business of hospitality is that germs, allergens and other types of contaminants are all a potential issue for everyone who visits a hotel or resort property. One would never want to see the day when HAI, which stands for hospital-associated infection, also translates to hotel-associated infection. Fortunately, more hotels and resorts are adopting environmental hygiene practices that have been developed for the health care industry.

It wasn't too long ago that methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) first made headlines as a major cause of hospital-associated infections,which was increasingly difficult to treat in humans because of its resistance to antibiotics. This summer, it was reported in the medical journal *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology* that MRSA infections doubled at academic medical centers in the U.S. between 2003 and 2008. This latest research, conducted by the University of Chicago Medicine and the University HealthSystem Consortium, countered another recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that found MRSA cases in hospitals were decreasing.

Arguably even more alarming is that researchers attribute much of the overall MRSA infection increase they detected to community-associated infections (CAIs) — those that were contracted outside the health care setting. According to the CDC, when MRSA first emerged, it was primarily contracted in hospitals or nursing homes.

"Community-associated MRSA infections, first described in 1998, have increased in prevalence greatly in the U.S. in the last decade," said Michael David, MD, PhD, an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Chicago and one of the study's authors. "Meanwhile, health care-associated strains have generally been declining."

Indeed, the MRSA superbug now is a primary factor for a growing number of infections acquired among athletes, students and the military without having any exposure to health care facilities. It's found in community facilities, on farms, zoos and oceanic animals, pets and even on public beaches.

The fact is, superbugs like MRSA and *Clostridium difficile* (C. difficile) are no longer exclusive to the hospital setting. CAIs, like HAIs, have emerged as a serious public health concern.

Earlier this year, Best Western, as part of an ongoing program, announced it was rolling out several new cleaning technologies used in hospitals, such as UV wands and black lights, to more than 2,100 of its hotels in North America.

"A clean hotel is a basic expectation for guests, and rightly so," Ron Pohl, a Best Western senior vice president, said in a statement. "We are unlocking the potential of the housekeeping profession by providing new tools and training to help ensure customer satisfaction, loyalty and ultimately trust."

It's no secret the role hygiene plays when people go about selecting a hotel. Last summer, a survey by Chubb Group Insurance Companies found that cleanliness was the most important factor to the average hotel guest in selecting or returning to a hotel — topping even price, location and security.

Several years ago, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide became the first large operator of multiple brands to place a high priority on guest safety and satisfaction by ensuring that cleaning aimed at infection prevention be used in guest rooms.

> "Once we implemented a system that ensured that infection prevention standards of cleaning were used in guest rooms and we began to clean in the right way, our guest satisfaction scores improved."
>
> **–Ron Pohl, Best Western senior vice president**

Glen Lewis, general manager of the Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel in Portland, Ore., works with his director and assistant director of housekeeping to emphasize to the members of the hotel's housekeeping team the importance of their role in providing a safe guest environment and maintaining (and increasing) guest satisfaction scores, which contribute to the overall financial performance of the 200-plus-room facility.

"We know that cleanliness and overall room conditions are key drivers of customer satisfaction," Lewis said. "Once we implemented a system that ensured that infection prevention standards of cleaning were used in guest rooms and we began to clean in the right way, our guest satisfaction scores

(continued on next page)

One way room attendents can help prevent infections in guest rooms is to use color-coded cloths to differentiate between materials meant to clean the bathroom and materials for cleaning the living areas.

improved, probably 10 percent or better."

These hospital-grade environmental hygiene methodologies include: area-specific color-coded products and one-per-room practices (color-specific products for each guest room and guest bathroom, thereby ensuring that the bathroom is isolated from other guest areas); an emphasis on thoroughly cleaning people-touch-points; and a rigorous training and education regimen for room attendants.

Let's take a closer look at each one of these practices:

Mitigating The Risk Of Cross-Contamination

A key to eliminating cross-contamination in a hotel guest room is first to understand that what you can't see can still make you sick (e.g., a virus such as norovirus). In addition, the housekeeping staff need to have a basic understanding of infection prevention. This includes the implementation of methodologies that ensure cross-contamination from guest-room-to-guest-room and bathroom-to-living areas is minimized or eliminated altogether, and ensuring that housekeepers are provided with high-performance, color-coded products and ergonomic hardware designed and developed for specific cleaning challenges.

When used according to accepted protocols, one color-coded wiper is used in the guest living and sleeping area with an emphasis on the thorough cleaning of people-touch-points. Three products, differentiated by color, are used in the guest bathroom. These are: a wiper (for sink, faucets, shower head); a hook-and-loop flat mop (for ease of use) that is used on shower walls from ceiling to tub, then the floor and out the door; and a double-sided mitt used to clean the toilet, and only the toilet, thereby isolating it and eliminating the risk of cross-contamination from toilet to guest living spaces and surfaces such as the TV remote or the coffee pot.

"The fact that the products we use are color-coded makes the system very easy to use, especially since members of our housekeeping team are multicultural," Lewis said. "Being able to train via color specifics vs. fabric or other tools simplifies the concepts of cleaning and makes communications and education easier."

A widely reported recent study by Katie Kirch of the University of Houston tells why isolating the toilet in hotel rooms is so important. Kirch's team found high numbers of aerobic bacteria, which need oxygen to survive, in bathroom sinks and floors, and TV remotes the most. Light switches contained the most fecal bacteria.

Mike Powers, general manager of the Hilton Garden Inn in El Segundo, Calif., agreed that use of color-coding is a great concept. His hotel has been working with similar products for a year. "It makes it very easy for the staff to understand the process," Powers said. "It's also simple for the director of housekeeping to visually inspect to ensure that the proper cloth is used for appropriate procedures."

Once used (in one room), they are placed in designated containers for proper cleaning and disinfecting, and should be processed in accordance with CDC Bloodborne Pathogens Guidelines for Laundering. No used or soiled cleaning products should ever be re-used or taken into a second guest room.

It should be noted that cotton cloths such as retired face cloths, pillow cases, bath towels and other cotton (cellulose) products, often used for cleaning, serve as a nurturing environment and growth medium for bacteria. If laundered improperly or incompletely, cellulose-based wipers can be a source of re-contamination of guest room surfaces. Additionally, cellulose-based wipers cause many disinfectants, including quaternary ammonium compounds (or "quat"), the most common disinfectant used in hotels and hospitals, to lose their efficacy. Quat disinfectants are reasonably priced so they are widely used; however, they are also one of the lowest-level disinfectants in use today, and any degradation of their efficacy must be considered a

deficiency in the overall infection prevention program of a property.

Dealing With the C.Difficile Challenge

There is increasing prevalence of C. difficile in the community: the CDC reports that C. difficile infections are at historic highs; *USA Today* recently reported that there are about 30,000 C. difficile deaths a year in the United States. C difficile could, like norovirus, become an infection prevention issue for the hospitality industry.

There are a number of EPA-approved disinfectants available today that are capable of destroying C. difficile (available at www.epa.gov/oppad001/list_k_clostridium.pdf). However, with an eye toward the budget bottom line, many establishments continue to use a 10-percent bleach solution — which is almost double the manufacturer recommended dilution — as a primary tool to combat C. difficile. One side effect of using bleach is the destructive results that occur to furniture, plumbing fixtures, tile and cotton-based products. In particular, cotton terry cloth wipers break down in the presence of bleach and leave lint on surfaces. Deteriorating terry products also increase the maintenance costs of laundry equipment. Using the appropriate products designed for these challenges ensures that bacteria is removed from surfaces and eliminated from the guest environment.

Emphasis on High-Touch Surface Cleaning

Studies have shown that one of the most contaminated objects in guest rooms is the remote control.

In addition to the expected common grime, researchers have found multiple strains of bacteria, body fluids, secretions and solid waste on remote controls. Why? The first things guests do in their room are turn on the television and use the toilet, and not necessarily in that order. Regardless of the star rating of the hotel, people are people and behave in the guest room as they do at home. Surfaces are touched, sneezed upon, wiped on and good hygiene practices are often left unobserved.

Thus, it is incumbent upon the housekeeper to look upon the entire room as contaminated. Germs cannot be seen with the naked eye, nor can they be identified with fluorescent markers or adenosine triphosphate (ATP) swabs. And it is human nature to be unaware of the common surfaces touched throughout the day or when occupying a guest room.

Housekeepers must clean and disinfect every surface that is commonly touched by guests as well as

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

those areas not top of mind: lamp switches, clothing hangers, irons and ironing boards (when was the last time the ironing board cover was changed?), luggage racks, air-conditioning covers and switches and hand-touch surfaces of drawers. And, of course, the toilet handle, wall light switches, door handles, ice bucket, coffee pot and other high-touch areas should be cleaned and disinfected every time a room is cleaned.

Training and Education

Training and education are essential aspects of any job, and housekeeping is no different. Keeping up with new products, technology and processes is an ongoing and time-consuming endeavor, yet one that reaps multiple rewards.

Glen Lewis at the Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel said his housekeeping team is trained via videos and step-by-step printed collateral materials. "Update training classes are held quarterly," he said. "But training goes on every day. This investment in training helps to convey to the housekeeping staff that we have high expectations related to cleanliness and safety."

Most executive housekeepers welcome the opportunity to expand the knowledge of their staffs and appreciate the collaborative training from suppliers. With the proliferation of multi-drug resistant organisms (MDROs) in the population, executive housekeepers are looking for more evidence-based and clinically proven ways to protect guests and staff. They are requiring suppliers to become involved in the implementation, training and outcomes promised from products. Vendors are finding that the days of "smoke and mirrors" are no longer acceptable as executive housekeepers become more highly trained, educated and savvy to the needs and safety of guests.

The steps being taken by a few properties and chains to bring in infection prevention specialists and consultants will not be short-lived. Augmenting training and assisting on instituting new cleaning and disinfection processes will soon become a standard and required practice as the hospitality industry mobilizes to face these new challenges.

With 2-5 percent of the population being potential carriers of the organisms that can cause CAIs, hospitality training is becoming more technical, more clinical and more focused on what were previously considered "hospital" issues.

Conclusion

A clean guest room is no longer going to be the most important thing to a guest — many are going to expect proof that the room has also been properly disinfected and is a safe environment. The hospitality industry is stepping up to the challenge even now by partnering with vendors who are able to bring their experience in health care infection control and develop processes that are easily and economically transferred to the hospitality industry.

These programs support sustainability, improve air quality and have proven to reduce chemical usage, water usage and workman's compensation claims. Hotels are finding these partnerships to be win-wins with benefits that will be far-reaching and long lasting.

But the real winner here? The guest, of course. ◆

John Scherberger is the founder and president of Healthcare Risk Mitigation, Inc., a consulting enterprise whose purpose is to assist health care and hospitality professionals in mitigating risks in their work and care environment with particular emphasis on reducing health care and community-acquired infections through education, training, and process development.

IEHA Staff Contact Information

IEHA's Association Office is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. EST, Mon.-Fri. Call toll free: (800) 200-6342 or (614) 895-7166, or fax: (614) 895-1248. Or, write: IEHA, 1001 Eastwind Drive, Suite 301, Westerville, OH 43081-3361; or email: *excel@ieha.org*. Visit us on the web at *www.ieha.org*. We have changed to an automatic voicemail system. Dial the appropriate extension listed below for the department you wish to reach. If you are unable to reach the appropriate person, please leave a detailed message; we will return your call as soon as possible.

ACCOUNTING: Tax and group exemption information • ask for Beth Risinger, ext. 104. Accounts payable and receivable • ask for Jody Thomas, ext. 101, or email her at *jthomas@ieha.org*.

CONVENTIONS: Seminars, exhibit and registration information • ask for Beth Risinger, ext. 104, or email her at *brisinger@ieha.org*.

EDUCATION: General education information, PECP courses and information, exam results, status of REH/CEH applications • ask for Jessica Chubb, ext. 105, or email her at *jessica@ieha.org*. Evaluation of transcripts, scholarships • ask for Beth Risinger, ext. 104, or email her at *brisinger@ieha.org*.

CHAPTERS: Information and activity, rebates and minutes • ask for Tremaine Chubb, ext. 103, or email him at *tremaine@ieha.org*.

EHT MAGAZINE:
PUBLISHER: ask for Beth Risinger, ext. 104, or email her at *brisinger@ieha.org*.
EDITORIAL: ask for Leah Driscoll, ext. 102, or email her at *ldriscoll@ieha.org*.
ADVERTISING: ask for Leah Driscoll, ext. 102, or email her at *ldriscoll@ieha.org*.
SUBSCRIPTIONS: ask for Jody Thomas, ext. 101, or email her at *jthomas@ieha.org*.

JOB NEWS: ask for Leah Driscoll, ext. 102, or email her at *ldriscoll@ieha.org*.

MEMBERSHIP: New membership, member benefits, renewals, applications, prospect packets, dues received • ask for Jody Thomas, ext. 101, or email her at *jthomas@ieha.org*.

POLICY: Administration, By-Laws, P&P questions • ask for Beth Risinger, ext. 104, or email her at *brisinger@ieha.org*.

PLACE ORDERS: ask for Jody Thomas, ext. 101, or email her at *jthomas@ieha.org*.

CHECK ORDERS: ask for Jody Thomas, ext. 101, or email her at *jthomas@ieha.org*.

INTERNATIONAL HOUSEKEEPERS WEEK: information, specialty items • ask for Jody Thomas, ext. 101, or email her at *jthomas@ieha.org*.

TECHNICAL QUESTIONS: Ask for Leah Driscoll, ext. 102, or for Beth Risinger, ext. 104. Or, post questions online at IEHA Unify by visiting *www.ieha.org/unify.php*.