How infection control can start in medical school

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Timothy M. Smith
Senior News Writer

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, infection prevention and control was too often seen as the domain of a specially trained group of health professionals. Now, of course, everyone recognizes their personal responsibility for preventing and controlling the spread of infectious diseases. Still, not everyone knows where to start.

The AMA produced a webinar for the AMA Medical Student Section (AMA-MSS) featuring presentations from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) experts about the agency’s Project Firstline initiative, a national training collaborative for health care infection control.

The AMA is a collaborator in the CDC effort, which is designed to meet the many needs of the health care workforce and ensure they have the knowledge they need to protect themselves, their coworkers and their patients from the spread of infectious diseases in health care settings.

“Project Firstline’s innovative content is designed so that—regardless of a health care worker’s previous training or educational background—they can understand and confidently apply the infection control principles and protocols necessary to protect themselves, their facility, their family and their community from infectious disease threats, such as COVID-19,” the CDC’s website says.

Understanding “why?”

The goal is to create a culture of expertise on the front lines, said Elizabeth McClune, program lead of Project Firstline.

“It’s great to have infection preventionists, but … there are times when you don’t have one, and there’s no way that we’ve figured it out yet to clone enough of them so that they could be at a one-to-one ratio with everyone in the health care system,” she said. “We want people to feel empowered to think for themselves and to understand the ‘why’ behind these recommendations.”
Flexible access

“We want to go to where you are,” McClune said, noting that Project Firstline will appear on numerous websites and podcasts, including the AMA Ed Hub™. “If you’re on the Ed Hub, we’ll be on the Ed Hub.”

In fact, Project Firstline has several modules on the AMA Ed Hub, covering everything from infection control and virus basics to injection safety and hand hygiene.

It’s part of a $2.1 billion effort by the CDC to protect patients and health workers from COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

This investment “will assist health care personnel to prevent infections more effectively in health care settings, support rapid response to detect and contain infectious organisms, enhance laboratory capacity and engage in innovation targeted at combating infectious disease threats,” an announcement from the CDC said.

It will push improvements in some 34,000 hospitals, nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, dialysis clinics, ambulatory surgery centers and additional outpatient settings.

Backed by COVID-19 research

A study of health-care-associated infections in 2020 showed significant increases in the national standardized infection ratios for central-line-associated bloodstream infections, catheter-associated urinary tract infections, ventilator-associated events, select surgical site infections and *Clostridioides difficile* and methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteremia laboratory-identified events from 2019.

“These are things that are, at their heart, systems of practice that are designed to protect patients, but also your colleagues,” Michael Bell, MD, said of Project Firstline. He is the deputy director of the CDC’s Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion.

“We all want to be able to go to work and come home without bringing bad stuff with us,” Dr. Bell added.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/medical-students/medical-student-health/how-infection-control-can-start-medical-school

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