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Alaska Launches a Health Care-Associated Infections Prevention Program

Background

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines health care-associated infections (HAIs) as infections that patients acquire during the course of receiving treatment within a health care setting. In addition to the substantial morbidity and mortality associated with HAIs, the financial burden attributable to these infections is considerable (Table).

Table. Annual Morbidity, Mortality and Cost Estimates of Healthcare-associated Infections in US Hospitals^{1,2}

Type of Infection	Number of Infections	Number of Deaths	Cost (Billions)
Urinary tract	560,000	8,000	\$0.4–0.5
Bloodstream	250,000	31,000	\$2–8
Pneumonia	250,000	36,000	\$5–7
Surgical site	290,000	13,000	\$3–8
TOTAL	1,350,000	88,000	\$10.4–23.5

In response to a rising concern about this public health threat, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) developed an Action Plan to prevent HAIs.³ The plan includes recommendations for surveillance, research, communication, metrics for measuring progress toward national goals, and collaboration across all private and public health care sectors.

HAI Reporting in Alaska

To date, 23 states require HAI reporting to state health departments. Alaska does not currently mandate HAI reporting by health care providers or laboratories. Most Alaska health care facilities track HAIs individually, and one Alaska hospital reports some of their facility data to CDC using the National Health and Safety Network (NHSN).

Two HAI-related bills were recently introduced in previous Alaska legislative sessions. The first, SB 208 (2006), would have required hospitals to collect data and disclose quarterly HAI reports to the public. The second, SB 62 (2007), would have required HAI reporting to the Department of Health and Social Services by health care facilities and would have established the Advisory Committee on Public Reporting of HAIs. Neither bill passed.

Recovery Act Funding

The 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act required all states receiving Preventative Health and Health Services Block Grant funds to submit a state HAI Prevention Plan to HHS by January 1, 2010 in order to demonstrate progress toward meeting the national prevention targets as described in the HHS Action Plan. Subsequently, the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) granted 49 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico funds to help develop and implement an HAI Prevention Plan that targets hospitals. Alaska received funding in September, and subsequently hired an HAI Program Coordinator in November to develop the Alaska HAI Prevention Plan and Program.

Formation of an Advisory Group

In order to assist states in meeting the January 1 deadline to submit an HAI Prevention Plan and to facilitate coordination with national HAI prevention efforts, CDC created a State HAI plan template. The CDC template recommended establishing an HAI advisory group to include local and regional partners with HAI expertise.

The Alaska HAI Advisory Group was created (Box), and met for the first time in December 2009. The Group reviewed the CDC HAI plan template and selected two initial HAI priority prevention targets for surveillance: central line-associated bloodstream infections and invasive methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infections. Based on this decision, the Alaska HAI Program Coordinator will discuss surveillance for these two conditions with Alaska hospitals to determine the best options for voluntary HAI reporting in Alaska. The Advisory Group will meet at least quarterly for the foreseeable future to determine the best means of obtaining and using data to report and reduce HAIs in Alaska.

Box. Alaska HAI Advisory Group Representation (Number of members)

- Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (1)
- Local Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (1)
- Practicing infectious disease physicians (2)
- Hospital laboratory supervisor (1)
- Mountain-Pacific Quality Health-Alaska (2)
- Hospital using NHSN (1)
- Hospital not using NHSN (1)
- Alaska State Public Health Laboratory (1)
- Other members may be added in the future

The Alaska HAI Prevention Plan

The Alaska HAI Prevention Plan was completed on December 28, 2009 and is posted on the Section of Epidemiology's Internet home page.⁴ It is a multi-year plan that will be updated at least annually. The first priority is to reduce hospital-based HAIs; however, we hope to include other health care facilities (e.g., ambulatory surgery centers, dialysis centers, long term care facilities, etc.) as the program develops.

The success of the Alaska HAI Prevention Program will depend heavily on development of effective partnerships with stakeholders.

References

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3. DHSS Action Plan to Prevent HAIs. Available at: <http://www.hhs.gov/ophis/initiatives/hai/infection.html>
4. Alaska HAI Prevention Plan. Available at: www.epi.alaska.gov/id/hai/AlaskaHAIPlan.pdf