

THIRD HAND VECTOR

Opinion Editorial Series from
Clinical Experts in the COVID-19 Era



PROTECTING YOUR PATIENT – OP ED #4

Protect Your Patient



By Cynthia Cadwell, RN, ANP-BC, CNS

In the 1840s, Ignaz Semmelweis proved that handwashing reduced death in childbirth. Providers have since strived to prevent cross contamination, including the use of environmental sanitization between patients. The point of ‘care’ is to apply life-saving science while doing no harm. Yet, insidious infections occur and can be potentially lethal, particularly in the immunocompromised patients, even among meticulous providers.

Despite the abundance of studies showing the need for cleaning frequently touched items such as cell phones, keyboards, patient care areas and other items to prevent the cross contamination, it is difficult to ensure compliance.

Providers know the importance of cleaning their stethoscope before use on a patient. However, when observing stethoscope hygiene in practice, busy providers who see multiple patients in a fast-paced environment frequently forget... because humans can and will make errors!¹



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Effective quality techniques are exemplified by routine, simple methods implemented in standard workflows. Best practices are those that are easily applied by multiple staff without work-arounds.² Technologies to help eliminate human error are the most effective – ensuring providers do the right thing, each and every time. Hand sanitizer and gloves immediately visible at the entrance of patient rooms enhance routine use. Adding a touch-free stethoscope barrier dispenser in these locations will decrease stethoscope contamination. Goal: “Do No Harm.”



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Cynthia Cadwell, Principal Consultant at Cadwell Consulting, is a Nurse Practitioner with over 25 years of clinical and biotech experience focused on lean initiatives and quality improvement for patient care and healthcare systems. As an RN, CNS, CPHQ, and Clinical Educator, her clinical experience spans SNF/PAC, advanced wound care, occupational health, critical care and cardiovascular disease.

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Third Hand Vector series spotlights the clinician's third hand and the risks that contaminated stethoscopes pose to clinicians, patients and healthcare systems. The series features leading experts in infection control, patient care and quality measures raising awareness of the importance of aseptic barriers in reducing transmission of infectious diseases.

1. Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Quality of Health Care in America; Kohn LT, Corrigan JM, Donaldson MS, editors. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2000.
2. Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century. Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Quality of Health Care in America. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2001.



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