Effectiveness of an audible reminder on hand hygiene adherence

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Key Words:
Cross-infection
Prevention
Guideline
Handwashing
Health personnel
Infection control

Background: Multimodal interventions aim to improve health care workers' adherence to hand hygiene guidelines. Visitors are not primarily targeted, but may spread epidemic infections. Effective interventions that improve the adherence of visitors to hand hygiene guidelines are needed to prevent the transmission of epidemic infections to or from health care environments.

Methods: An electronic motion sensor–triggered audible hand hygiene reminder was installed at hospital ward entrances. An 8-month preinterventional and postinterventional study was carried out to measure the adherence of hospital visitors and staff to hand hygiene guidelines.

Results: Overall hand hygiene adherence increased from 7.6% to 49.9% (P < .001). The adherence of visitors and nonclinical staff increased immediately from 10.6% to 63.7% and from 5.3% to 34.8%, respectively (P < .001). Adherence of doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists increased gradually from 4.5% to 38.3%, from 5.4% to 43.4%, and from 8.7% to 49.5%, respectively (P < .001). Improved adherence was sustained among visitors and clinical staff (P < .001), but not among nonclinical staff (P = .341).

Conclusions: The electronic motion sensor–triggered audible reminder immediately and significantly improved and sustained greater adherence of hospital visitors and clinical staff to hand hygiene guidelines. This is an effective addition to multimodal hand hygiene interventions and may help control epidemic infections.

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Multimodal interventions aim to improve the adherence of health care workers to hand hygiene guidelines, with the goal of reducing health care–associated infections. Multimodal interventions include adequate provision of alcohol-based hand rub and soap and water, training and education, evaluation and feedback of performance, provision of workplace reminders, and a culture of safety.1 Visitors may transmit epidemic infections and are not primarily targeted by multimodal interventions. The present study was initiated in response to the H1N1 influenza pandemic of 2009. There is a need for an effective, rapidly deployable, yet inexpensive intervention aimed at improving the adherence of visitors to hand hygiene guidelines to prevent the transmission of epidemic infections to or from health care environments without the need for education or training.

The World Health Organization’s (WHO) “Five Moments for Hand Hygiene” are recommended indications for hand hygiene, which include before and after touching a patient and after touching a patient’s surroundings.2 The hand hygiene guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the WHO mandate that alcohol-based hand rub sanitizers be made available at the entrance to patient rooms or other convenient locations.3,4 If patients are not confined to single rooms, then the entrance to patient rooms is synonymous with the entrance to the ward. This represents the last doorway passed through before touching a patient and the first doorway passed through after touching a patient or a patient’s surroundings. Even though this is not strictly one of the WHO’s five moments, 28% of hospitals in the Republic of Ireland currently provide alcohol-based hand rub sanitizers at the entrance to every ward.5 This convenient location for hand hygiene is used by visitors more often than sanitizer located at patient bedside, and accounts for 21% of all alcohol-based hand rub consumption in National Health Service hospital wards.6 Local guidelines promote hand hygiene before entering or leaving a ward.7 Alcohol-based hand rub sanitizers were provided at the entrance to a New Zealand hospital during the H1N1 influenza pandemic; the use of sanitizer rose to 18% during the pandemic8 and dropped to 8% four months later.9
One of the WHO’s objectives for future research is the implementation and evaluation of individual multimodal hand hygiene intervention components. A study investigating improved reminders at individual patient room entrances found a significant increase in alcohol-based hand rub use and reduced healthcare-associated infection rates, but did not establish the effect on visitors or at hospital ward entrances.

In this article, we report the effectiveness of an electronic motion sensor–triggered audible hand hygiene reminder in increasing the use of alcohol-based hand rub by visitors and healthcare workers at the entrances to hospital wards.

METHODS

We conducted a preinterventional and postinterventional study over an 8-month period in one hospital. Local infection prevention and control guidelines already promoted the use of alcohol-based hand rub by visitors and health care workers through the Intranet and posters. Two clinical researchers directly observed visitors and hospital staff entering and exiting wards via 4 separate doors to measure their adherence to hand hygiene guidelines using alcohol-based hand rub placed at each entrance. The researchers disguised their observations by pretending to be waiting for the elevator (Fig 1). Any hand hygiene attempt, regardless of technique, at the moment of entering or exiting the ward was rated as adherence. The designation of the subject (visitor, doctor, nurse, physiotherapist, or nonclinical staff) was recorded. Observations were completed over three 15-minute periods during the day. The preintervention phase took place over 2 months from November to December 2009, and the postintervention phase extended for 6 months from January to June 2010. No other hand hygiene interventions were implemented during the study period.

Implementation of the intervention involved the installation of electronic motion sensor–triggered audible hand hygiene reminders (Technical Initiatives UK, Essex, UK). The motion sensors and speakers were located in the ceiling in the corridor outside the ward entrances. The audible alert sounded the following message: “Please clean your hands with hand rub dispensers when entering or exiting any clinical ward.” Alcohol-based hand rub dispensers had already been installed by the doors. After activation, the alert deactivated for 20 seconds. The entire system comprised 4 motion sensors and 3 speakers, cost $500, and was installed in half a day.

The resulting data were first analyzed to compare hand hygiene adherence during the preintervention and postintervention phases. Then the preintervention phase and the second half of the postintervention phase were compared to detect sustained improvements in adherence. The percentage adherence values are calculated from the numerator, consisting of the number of hand hygiene opportunities used, and the denominator, consisting of the total number of hand hygiene opportunities. We used Pearson’s $\chi^2$ to test binomial data ($\alpha = 0.05$, 2-tailed). All analyses were carried out using SPSS version 18 (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL).

This study was granted approval from the Imperial Healthcare National Health Service Trust’s Audit Department.

RESULTS

A total of 2,863 hand hygiene opportunities were observed during 54 periods over the entire 8-month study period, including 706 opportunities in the preintervention phase and 2,157 opportunities in the postintervention phase. Visitors were the most frequently observed subject group (Table 1).

Overall, hand hygiene adherence increased from 7.6% to 49.9% ($P < .001$). Adherence increased from 10.6% to 63.7% in visitors ($P < .001$), from 4.5% to 38.3% in doctors ($P < .001$), from 5.4% to 43.4% in nurses ($P < .001$); from 8.7% to 49.5% in physiologists ($P < .001$), and from 5.3% to 34.8% in nonclinical staff ($P < .001$). The effect was immediate in visitors and nonclinical staff and gradual in clinical staff, including doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists.
 Known to vary among professional groups. Adherence to hand hygiene was composed mainly of porters. Adherence to hand hygiene was not sustained. This group revealed that nonclinical staff was the only group of subjects whose half of the intervention phase with the preintervention phase intervention reported thus far, hand hygiene was still not performed on entrances to hospital wards. Before the intervention, the overall rate of hand hygiene adherence was 7.6%. After the intervention, the rate improved to 49.9% among visitors, 52.5% among physiologists, 49.5% among doctors, 43.4% among nurses, and 34.8% among nonclinical staff. The rate decreased to 45.5% among doctors, 50.9% among physiologists, 52.5% among nonclinical staff, and 42.1% among visitors after the intervention. The rate was not significantly different between the first and second 3 months of the intervention, but the rate was significantly lower among nonclinical staff compared to visitors and clinical staff. 

### Discussion

This is the first report of the effectiveness of an electronic motion sensor—triggered audible reminder aimed at increasing the hand hygiene adherence of hospital ward visitors. This interventional study includes data on nearly 3,000 hand hygiene opportunities at the entrances to hospital wards. Before the intervention, the overall rate of hand hygiene adherence was 7.6%. After the intervention, the overall rate of hand hygiene adherence increased by 42.3%. Although this was a significant improvement, and more substantial than that from any other ward or patient room entrance hand hygiene intervention reported thus far, hand hygiene was still not performed on half of the occasions when it was indicated. Comparing the second half of the intervention phase with the preintervention phase revealed that nonclinical staff was the only group of subjects whose improved adherence to hand hygiene was not sustained. This group was composed mainly of porters. Adherence to hand hygiene is known to vary among professional groups. The identification of a motivated champion and an engaged leader has been shown to correlate with the success of hand hygiene interventions. The feeling of being observed, the belief of being a role model, a positive attitude toward hand hygiene, and a low workload are associated with adherence to hand hygiene guidelines. These factors may need to be addressed to promote sustained benefits of this intervention in nonclinical staff.

Our results compare favorably with those for other hand hygiene interventions reported previously. In one study, an electronically activated audible hand hygiene reminder improved adherence to hand hygiene guidelines after leaving the patient’s room by 8.2%, from 19.1% to 27.3%. In another study, placement of a conspicuous red sign at a surgical ward entrance increased hand hygiene from 24% to 62%, an improvement of 38%. Comprehensive multimodal interventions have reported improvements in hand hygiene adherence of 18%-74.9%, along with significant reductions in the rates of health care—associated infections.

The WHO recommends reminders including posters, leaflets, and screensavers as part of a multimodal hand hygiene intervention. The present study has evaluated a novel reminder. The electronic motion sensor—triggered audible hand hygiene reminder does not require education or training and is rapidly deployable, inexpensive, and immediately effective.

The WHO’s five moments are hand hygiene guidelines for the bedside, which are important for preventing the transmission of health care—associated infection by health care workers. This intervention was not tested at the bedside, and thus its effectiveness in improving adherence to the WHO’s five moments is unknown. An audible reminder may not be appropriate inside a ward; however, a motion sensor—triggered visual message has been implemented successfully and might be suitable for this purpose. The efficacy of this intervention on the transmission of pathogens has not been tested; however, complete adherence to hand hygiene guidelines may reduce health care—associated infections by 40%.

We have shown that an electronic motion—sensor triggered audible hand hygiene reminder can significantly improve adherence to hand hygiene guidelines. This intervention may be most suitable for helping prevent the transmission of epidemic infections to and from health care environments.

### Acknowledgment

We thank Amal Mohamed, clinical assistant at Charing Cross Hospital, for collecting data in the latter period of the study. We acknowledge the support of the Centre for Patient Safety and Service Quality, which is funded by the National Institute of Health Research, the Centre for Infection Prevention and Management, which is funded by the UK Clinical Research Collaboration and the Biomedical Research Centre at Imperial College London.

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