“TAKE TIME. SAVE LIVES. CLEAN HANDS PROTECT:”
ENCOURAGING HOSPITAL HAND HYGIENE THROUGH HEALTH PROMOTION

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Purpose: Approximately two million hospital patients in the U.S. acquire an infection during their visit annually, resulting in 90,000 deaths and $4.5-5.7 billion in additional medical expenses. Hand hygiene, which refers to cleaning hands with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based product, is considered the single most important step healthcare practitioners can take to prevent the spread of infection to and between hospital patients. However, healthcare providers across the country only comply with professional standards of hand washing one-third to one-half of the time. The purpose of this project is to explore how a communication campaign can effectively increase hand hygiene behavior in providers and patients, as well as make patients aware of their right to ask providers to clean their hands before administering care.

Methods: A campaign was developed based on formative research at a Level 1 Trauma Facility located in Central Texas. Two sets of materials were developed, all of which included a unifying tagline: “Take time. Save lives. Clean hands protect.” One set featured photographs of a series of hands wearing various forms of protective gear (e.g., oven mitt, winter glove) with the words “Protects you” above the image. The final photo is of a pair of soapy hands with the caption “Protects everyone.” These materials strive to inform practitioners and patients that hand washing serves not only a personal protective function (similar to the other forms of protective gear) but also protects others. These materials will be placed primarily in patient areas across the hospital.

The second campaign concept features a timeline of significant advancements in medicine over time. It brings attention to the fact that hand washing is still one of the most effective ways to control infection today, although discovered as early as 1847. Providers are aware of the risk of healthcare acquired infections; this concept strives to remind them there is a way to prevent the spread of infection, it is nothing new, and they have it in their power to comply. These materials will be placed predominately in areas accessed mainly by hospital staff.

Three months after the campaign launch, a survey will be administered to a sample of patients and providers/hospital staff. Questions in both surveys will be guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior. The patient survey will focus on perceptions of hand hygiene among providers/staff, as well as individual hand washing attitudes and behaviors. The provider/staff survey will ask questions regarding attitudes and beliefs about hand hygiene in general and under certain circumstances unique to the hospital setting. Opinions on the campaign materials will be collected from all participants.

Findings: Baseline data ($N = 300$) will be complete in February 2013 and analyzed for presentation at the conference, along with information on campaign strategy and design.

Conclusions: Previous research emphasizes the critical nature of hand hygiene in hospitals to prevent the spread of infection. This project demonstrates the importance of an academic-practice partnership to develop a persuasive approach to health promotion campaign design.