

Keeping things clean

The public health sector is under considerable strain with the burden of disease, poor quality of care and lack of resources. However, an area where public hospitals and clinics can compare favourably with their private sector peers is on general and clinical hygiene practices.



Emma Corder, country manager for Nilfisk

“Maintaining the highest levels of hygiene is a rudimentary principle in the industry, and one that requires neither huge investment nor highly-skilled staff,” says Emma Corder, country manager for Nilfisk South Africa.

“And while it is easy to focus on the unthinkable happening because of neglect in clinical areas, public spaces present a far wider-reaching threat to visitors and patients alike.”

According to StatsSA’s 2017 General Household Survey, 82 out of every 100 South Africans fall outside the medical aid net. This means that roughly 45-million people are largely dependent on public healthcare.

Public spaces

This mass of patients likely to flow to public health facilities presents a huge threat if they are not adequately prepared for the possibility of infection in their public spaces. This has led to improved training and education to combat potential bacterial infections, and presents an opportunity to prevent needless infections in public facilities.

“Hygiene is both one of the easiest ways to prevent infections and the weakest link in the chain that can be exploited the easiest if neglected,” Corder says. “This presents a golden opportunity for medical and hospital staff, even at the most resource-starved facility, to reduce the possibility of infection.”

Regular, thorough and methodical cleaning of public areas is almost certainly one of the easiest routes to preventing the spread of infections carried by both patients and their visitors. Given that both the materials and human resources needed to maintain hygienic conditions are a small portion of a hospital's budget, money should not be a prohibiting factor.

“And often it's not,” Corder says, “Unfortunately, stricter procurement rules to combat fraud and to include more suppliers in its supply chain; procurement processes often hamper the effective use of resources.

“Facility managers are hamstrung by these processes that often prevent them from holding sufficient stocks. While cleaning materials may not carry the same weight as medication, public facilities struggle equally to maintain the right stock levels to do their job properly.”

Newer technologies and machinery have come a long way to easing much of the cleaning burden, and significantly improved the effectiveness in clinical areas.

Jobs

Corder says that while the use of machinery is often decried for reducing jobs, that is seldom the case.

“We find that rather than reducing jobs, automation reduces the amount of time on general tasks so that more attention can be given to more specialised cleaning and disinfecting tasks,” she says. “Technology also has a huge role to play in improving the efficiency of disinfection required in clinical areas.”

Whether using the latest technology or simply improving processes so they have the materials they need, there is no reason public facilities have to suffer the stigma of being places that are unwelcoming and unclean.

“The industry is willing to support its public sector clients so that they can deliver healthcare safely and efficiently. Hygiene, after all, is the basis on which effective healthcare rests,” Corder says.

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