The Importance of Infection Control during Anesthesia and Resources to Improve your Practice

The 2007 outbreak of hepatitis C in a Las Vegas endoscopy clinic was traced to the improper injection techniques involving misuse of single-dose vials of propofol, which ultimately led to the single largest exposure patient notification event in history and resulted in multiple hepatitis C infections and two deaths. Since this incident, there have been at least 59 healthcare-associated outbreaks of hepatitis B and C reported, some involving pain management and outpatient surgery settings that employ nurse anesthetists, resulting in at least 239 known cases of iatrogenic transmission. These outbreaks have been attributed mostly to poor infection control practices (e.g., reuse of needles and syringes, inadequate hand hygiene), resulting in increased involvement of regulatory agencies and organizations to improve infection control practices in all healthcare settings.

Despite this increased vigilance and enforcement of infection control protocols, approximately 17 percent of surgical patients will acquire an infection traceable to their anesthesia care. So it must be asked, what occurs during anesthesia care where patients are getting sick with infections under your watch?

Consistently practicing every infection control procedure every time it is indicated during anesthesia is challenging. For a variety of reasons such as production pressure, task density, and the overall focus on immediate threats to patient safety, infection control practices may not be prioritized in anesthesia care. For example, the rapidity required when responding to sudden changes in a patient’s physiologic condition to prevent harm often hinders the anesthesia professional from washing hands for the recommended 20-second time period every single time it is indicated. Further complicating the matter, infections may not manifest until several days after patient contact, leading anesthesia professionals to miss the link between their behaviors and patient consequences.

Nurse anesthetists are ethically obligated to follow all recommended safety and infection control measures whenever possible to prevent patient harm. As the risk of patient morbidity and mortality from infections is all too real, with thousands of hospital-acquired infections and deaths each year, something must be done to improve infection control. While nurse anesthetists may face a dilemma adhering to infection control protocols while maintaining important patient safety standards during anesthesia care, the consequences of not following infection control practices must be weighed against the potential patient harm, especially if diverted from a case. Though the safety needs of the patient may demand immediate action, the safety needs of the patient also demand effective infection control whenever it does not pose an unacceptable risk.

Multi-faceted solutions are needed that address providing safe anesthesia care while adhering to infection control practices.

To learn about the potential solutions for providing safe anesthesia care and infection control simultaneously, read the newly published article, Infection Control and Patient Safety: What is Desirable and What is Possible during Anesthesia?, in the April edition of the AANA Online Journal.

Additional Infection Prevention and Control Resources
As infection control and prevention is an ongoing issue impacting nurse anesthesia practice, the AANA is actively involved in new and ongoing initiatives aimed at improving adherence in infection control.
• New partnership with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Nurses Association (ANA) in the Nursing Infection Control Education (NICE) Network, which seeks to Empower Nurses to Protect Themselves and Their Patients by providing real time, tailored, infection control training and resources. Visit www.aana.com/NICENetwork for more information.

• Continued partnership with the CDC as part of the Safe Injection Practices Coalition to promote safe injection practices through the One & Only Campaign. Visit http://www.oneandonlycampaign.org/ for more information.

• Development of evidence-based guidelines on infection control and safe injection practices available at www.aana.com/practicemanual.

• Updated information related to current events and issues related to infection control and prevention available at www.aana.com/professionalpractice.

References


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