Collaborating to improve public health in Washington State

A Freeway FOR GERMS

A central line is a tube that a doctor usually places in a large vein of a patient’s neck or chest to give medical treatment. When not put in correctly or kept clean, central lines can become a freeway for germs to enter the body and cause serious bloodstream infections called CLABSI (central line-associated bloodstream infections). Up to 1 in 4 of patients who get those infections can die. For years, Washington hospitals have had CLABSI rates that are among the lowest in the United States. How did they do it?

The Power of NETWORKING

The Washington State public health department, hospital association, and quality improvement organization partnered to implement and track ways to reduce CLABSI. CDC’s National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN), the nation’s most widely used healthcare-associated infection tracking system, played a role. Washington hospitals that report on CLABSI send data to NHSN and, in turn, Washington pulls NHSN data to ensure trustworthy reporting.

Data you can TRUST

- Even though they were required to collect data only on CLABSI in intensive care units (ICUs), Washington has established annual validation, or double checking, for reports of CLABSI from both ICU and non-ICU locations since 2010. Validation results in trustworthy data and ensures prevention efforts are on target.
- CDC funding through the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for Infectious Diseases Cooperative (ELC) helped by:
  - Strengthening infection control programs in hospitals in return for their participation in the CLABSI validation program.
  - Staffing one-third of the workforce needed to maintain validation programs.

Beyond ICUs

Washington State’s validation approach showed that:
- More CLABSI were occurring outside ICUs than inside ICUs.
- Patients more often brought CLABSI in with them, rather than getting them during their hospital stay.
- Infection more often occurs after lines have been in a patient for a while (called late onset). If lines aren’t well maintained, cleaned, or left in too long, infection can result.

Keeping CLABSI at Bay

Future prevention efforts to reduce CLABSI will include:
- Inside hospitals: Focus on late-onset CLABSI in non-ICU locations.
- Outside hospitals: Focus on outreach with home health services and dialysis centers to reinforce the importance of proper central line maintenance and infection prevention.