

The role of infection prevention and control (IPC) is fundamental in reducing the spread of infectious disease. Essential pillars of IPC such as hand washing, environmental decontamination and vaccination are vital to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. The failure to implement IPC measures in healthcare facilities can lead to the spread of healthcare associated infections (HCAIs). In hospitals HCAIs are linked to increased patient stay, increased treatment costs and increased mortality. HCAIs were estimated to cost the NHS approximately £1 billion a year and £56m of this is incurred after the patient is discharged.

The prevalence and impact of HCAIs infections is recognised in high and low income countries. The prevalence of HCAIs in low income countries has been highlighted by the World Health Organisation and there are stark contrasts in prevalence rates in comparison to high income countries¹. For example the prevalence rate of HCAIs in the UK is 9%. In contrast the prevalence rate in Mali in Africa, is 18.7%. According to the WHO this is related to a lack of awareness of the problem and also that other health priorities take precedence of patient safety concerns. The increased prevalence of HCAIs in low income countries may also be related to lack of resources (staff, facilities and equipment) and a lack of understanding and education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the importance of IPC to combat the threat of the SARS-CoV-2 virus spreading even further. Interventions such as the use of masks and hand hygiene have had a significant impact on limited further spread of the virus. The threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is of global importance and has placed further challenges of the IPC community. In 2019 alone there was an estimated 4.95 million deaths associated with bacterial AMR, 1.27 million of which were directly attributable to AMR². Healthcare professionals are frequently having to treat infections caused by AMR microorganisms and in some cases infections are being encountered where treatment options are limited. This further emphasises the importance of IPC as the prevention of infections caused by AMR microorganisms leaves limited treatment options. GAMA Healthcare have monitored and recognised the threat of AMR and welcome the strategies which have been implemented in the UK to tackle the threat of AMR.

The WHO states that appropriate hand hygiene is the single most effective action to stop the spread of infections³, and regular and effective hand hygiene is the most important thing one can do to protect themselves and others from an infection⁴. The importance of good hand hygiene to stop the spread of infection cannot be understated. The WHO reports that good hand hygiene can prevent up to 50% of hospital infections. Barriers to good hand hygiene include lack of access to hand washing facilities. Access to clean running water and soap is a fundamental to support the provision of basic hand hygiene.

Within IPC the threat of AMR is particularly pertinent. Given the global significance and threat of AMR there is a requirement for a unified approach to recognise the importance of how IPC measures can play a role in reducing the spread of infections caused by AMR microorganisms.

In comparison to lower income and developing countries in the UK there is an abundance of IPC resources to combat the threat from AMR and HCAIs. In collaboration with other developed countries, the UK Government has the opportunity to share the experience of good IPC practice on a global scale to tackle the global challenges from AMR and HCAI. In the UK and other countries, GAMA Healthcare have recognised the importance of training and education to support good IPC practice. Example

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include where training has supported initiatives to reduce HCAI rates and increased compliance. The provision of training to support fundamentals of good IPC practise are a opportunity for the UK Government to champion to improve awareness and understanding of good IPC practise in lower income countries. Increased awareness and education have the potential to improve IPC practise and support efforts to combat the spread of AMR and HCAs.

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to be 'Guy Braverman', written over a horizontal line.

Guy Braverman
Joint CEO & Co-Founder
GAMA Healthcare Ltd

References

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