

## IP&C - An editorial comment from the WHO

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Now wash your hands. Four clear words. One basic task. It couldn't be simpler. Yet making sure it happens every time and everywhere has proved extremely difficult.

When the Patient Safety movement was born, awareness of the scale of the problem became embarrassingly clear. Diverse fields such as industrial psychology, systems analysis and process re-engineering joined the clinical sciences to address both the structures and the processes that allowed error to flourish.

In addition to this we must now add a third component: training.

Education of health workers is important in two ways. First, an acceptance that trained perfectibility cannot exist. No amount of amount of instruction, drilling, rehearsal or experience will ever eliminate error. Second, that Patient Safety requires new ways of working and of thinking. We must train all health-care workers to be able to practise fluently in this changing environment. Our understanding of the importance of teamwork, human factors and patient engagement

has transformed what it means to be a health-care professional. Quality improvement science is at least as important to improved health-care outcomes as modern clinical drug trials.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Patient Safety Curriculum Guide was developed to address this need. The first edition, aimed at medical schools, was downloaded over 1500 times in over 100 countries within six months of being available free online. A global study of its effectiveness is now underway in countries including the USA, Ethiopia, India, Mexico and Saudi Arabia.

This Curriculum Guide is based on a framework of eleven topics: eight of these cover fundamental Patient Safety principles. The final three – infection prevention and control, drug safety, safe clinical procedures – focus on critical areas for Patient Safety improvement globally.

The Guide recognises that developing some skills is dependent on having acquired others. It is essential to cover the topic "Being an effective team player"

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is before tackling the material covering infection prevention and control.

Knowledge is essential, but this Curriculum Guide emphasises performance rather than attitudes. Safe practice is the key intended outcome. For infection prevention and control this not only includes limiting transmission by applying standard precautions, but also providing leadership to promote safe practice among others. Elsewhere, the Guide covers “Engaging with patients and carers”, applied to this area, the importance of being able to sensitively discuss health care-acquired infection with patients and carers.

WHO is now working together with the International Council of Nurses, the International Confederation of Midwives, FDI World Dental, the International Pharmaceutical Federation and the World Medical Alliance, with the support of the World Health Professions Alliance, to develop a multi-professional edition of the Patient Safety Curriculum Guide. A recent global online consultation via the Health Professions Global Network attracted over 1,800 participants in over 124 countries. One key theme to emerge was the importance of inter-professional working.

Are we ready for this yet? Perhaps, perhaps not. But safer health care undoubtedly requires safer health workers. The WHO Patient Safety Curriculum offers an opportunity to deliver this part of the solution.