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Title: A study of health care assistants' knowledge of, attitudes toward and practice of handwashing in a regional hospital in Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

Evidence indicates that handwashing is the most important and effective infection control measure to prevent nosocomial infection, a major cause of morbidity and mortality in hospitals. Nevertheless, studies have consistently shown that compliance with handwashing among health care personnel was low. So a large number of studies have been performed to examine the factors influencing handwashing practices of health care personnel. Those studies have evaluated the frequency of handwashing, impact of various interventions on handwashing frequency and handwashing techniques. However, little research has been published on these practices among health care assistants, the group of health care workers in closest and most continuous patient contact in the hospital.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the knowledge, attitude and practice of health care assistants with regard to handwashing. It attempted to identify the relationships among knowledge, attitude, practice, age, department, education level, training, and attendance of handwashing education talk. This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of health care assistants' knowledge, attitude and practice on handwashing. This in turn would help plan strategies most suitable to health care assistants so as to maximize the handwashing practice among them.

The study was a descriptive survey. A self-administered structured questionnaire was used to collect data. A total of 127 health care assistants working in a regional hospital with 1265 beds in Hong Kong completed the questionnaire.

The findings indicated that health care assistants' knowledge on handwashing for preventing infection was good whereas the properties of handwashing agents were poor. It was found that health care assistants' attitude towards handwashing was positive with prevention of infection being the most motivating factor for handwashing. On self-reported handwashing practice health care assistants reported that they washed their hands frequently especially for those activities more likely to result in contamination of hands. There were no significant differences found among health care assistants' level of knowledge, related attitude toward handwashing, handwashing practice between age, department, working experience, educational level, training and attendance of handwashing education talk. However, there was a positive correlation between knowledge, attitude and practice.

The results of this study suggested that, in order to decrease discrepancy between knowledge and practice and to achieve optimal compliance with handwashing, multifaceted approaches that include training, education, continue monitoring and feedback to staff on handwashing should be implemented.