Letters

One moment doctor! Have you forgotten hand hygiene?

By Gwendolyn L Gilbert

This is a reply to:

One moment doctor! Have you forgotten hand hygiene?

TO THE EDITOR: I must concur with Gilbert [1] that there is variability in how doctors interpret hand hygiene policies. If charged with strictly following the “Five Moments For Hand Hygiene”, there are areas in which, as doctors, our performance may not be reported as being satisfactory. An example would be a doctor in a four-bed ward turning from one patient to the next: after contact with one patient, evaporative alcohol applied to his or her hands has not dried before the doctor needs to make contact with the next patient. Correct hand hygiene procedure dictates applying the product after finishing with one patient and waiting for it to dry; then reapplying the product and waiting for it to dry before touching the next patient, without contacting anything else in the room first. Could it be that some of the lamented non-compliance is due to a flaw in the protocol?

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IN REPLY: Auditing the five moments of hand hygiene is potentially subjective, but auditor training is designed to ensure consistency between auditors within and between health care settings. Interpretative differences cannot explain consistent differences in compliance between professions. Moments sometimes, legitimately, coincide. The example given by Barnes is a double moment that would be audited as two correct moments if nothing were touched in between, as described in the Hand Hygiene Australia manual:

“Typically, this occurs when moving directly from one patient to another without touching anything in between . . . a single hand hygiene action will cover two moments for HH [hand hygiene], as Moments 4 and 1 coincide”.1

Nevertheless, it is common, when moving between patients — even those immediately adjacent to each other — for us to touch objects, unconsciously; for example, the bed curtain, door handle, patient record, stethoscope, mobile phone, our nose, etc. Any of these objects can be contaminated
with potential pathogens; failure to perform hand hygiene immediately before touching the next patient (Moment 1, the least often performed) can transmit pathogens more readily than most people realise.

Reference: