

## Healthcare Uniforms And The fight Against Superbugs

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It would seem these days that hospitals are run more like a business with financial concerns than a place to help the sick and wounded. Staff shortages and the enormous pressures to meet targets puts severe pressure on the NHS system and the inevitable corners get cut with disastrous results.

Healthcare uniforms are a symbol of our health service in the UK. However, they could be contributing towards the spread of the potentially fatal MRSA superbug as well as Norovirus winter sickness bug and Strep A.

Campaigns have been launched to clean up our hospitals to contain this problem. Various measures have been introduced but it seems to no avail.

Just last month, two new mothers died within days of giving birth in the same hospital from the simple Strep A germ that normally causes sore throats. It is claimed that a nurse had a sore throat, got the germ on her hands and passed it on through open wounds to the mothers.

You can't walk more than a few feet in a hospital these days without seeing a sign telling you to wash your hands. Anti bacterial hand soap dispensers are on every wall so how can these infections still be so widespread?

Could it be to do with the healthcare uniforms? Despite demands from nurses calling for a clean healthcare uniform for every shift, this is still not happening.

Nurses are being forced to change their uniforms in toilets because only a quarter of hospitals have adequate changing facilities. Many do not have any laundry facilities at all so staff are wearing their uniforms outside the hospital and washing them at home.

Many nurses are mothers, at home, surrounded by the germs that all children naturally bring home from school. With them having to wash their own healthcare uniforms, what hope is there of being able to contain the germs? Washing hands all day in hospital is all very well but what is the point if they get re-contaminated on their uniforms?

Some hospitals are taking their own steps against this problem and going further than government recommendations. Where the Norovirus winter sickness bug is breaking out in hospitals among vulnerable people, patients are being isolated and staff are being issued with theatre scrubs to wear instead of the standard healthcare uniform and these are being disposed of after every shift.

This seems like an expense but surely not as high as the one that costs lives? Or the expense of the multiple law suits that will potentially be filed against negligent hospitals. The much publicised case of an actress recently winning a 5 pounds million compensation claim after contracting MRSS, a strain of MRSA, from a hospital stay will set a precedent.

At the beginning of this year, the first rapid blood test for MRSA was introduced in America which can give results in two hours, rather than the usual two days.

This is a step forward in identifying patient sicknesses and should help confine the problem to a degree. However, Americans are finding the MRSA bug even more of a problem than the UK.

This is because it has taken a hold in the gay community, particularly around the Castro district of San Francisco. At first, health services couldn't see the connection as MRSA bug is passed on through skin to skin contact, with no obvious link to sexual orientation. However, it has now been found to be passed on through male gay sex. Therefore, we can look to the US for advancements in fighting the drug resistant bug that is taking such a hold.

As far as the UK is concerned, isolation units are set up for patients with drug resistant or transmittable illnesses. Standards of cleanliness have been looked at and improvements are being made constantly. The importance of hand washing is now drummed in to staff and visitors alike. The only thing left to look at is the role of the healthcare uniform, the way it is treated after use and how it can possibly be a cause of contamination.

Hygiene expert Catherine Harvey looks at the role of healthcare uniforms in hospitals. To find out more please visit <http://www.matrixuniforms.co.uk/>

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