

Role of infection control department during COVID 19 pandemic in Pakistan

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Abstract

The unknown reason of pneumonia was observed in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. Pakistan is low middle income country after the outbreak of COVID 19 facing lacking of awareness about infection control practices in hospital and in community. We have provided covid prevention guidelines to all stock holders. We have implemented infection control guidelines in our setup and have found the significant improvement in compliance. It should be replicate in other hospital setup to control such type of outbreaks.

Key word: Infection control; COVID19; Prevention

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Introduction

The unknown reason of pneumonia was observed in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, that was from coronavirus family, which has now spread rapidly from China to worldwide [1]. On March 11, 2020, the WHO announced COVID-19 as pandemic [2].

The neighboring countries of Pakistan extremely affected including China and Iran [3]. In Pakistan, the first case of COVID-19 has been confirmed by the Ministry of Health, government of Pakistan on February 26, 2020 in Karachi and Islam Abad [4]. During pandemic all countries reviewed their plan to manage outbreak situation, and this is also highly important for Pakistan to focus on infection control preparedness in Pakistan's healthcare system [5].

In past decades, many Asian countries lacked in infection control expertise in public and private sectors with very few of the hospitals having wide-range of Infection control departments. In fact implementation of even very simple practices of hand hygiene compliances have been a challenge in this region. Adequate implementation of infection control infrastructure in hospital is very difficult particularly in terms of shortage of staff and Personal protective equipment (PPE) with hospital facing engineering challenges to manage infective outbreaks. Now SARS COV 19 has changed the situation of world. The COVID-19 pandemic not only has created a challenge for common man but also for hospitals and health care workers too.

Pakistan was also hit hard with this pandemic with lack of PPE

and an overwhelming healthcare system becoming a new reality. It has been challenging to manage and balance health care system. This pandemic though, has given us a lesson by making us realize the importance of infection control particularly by every health and public authority and also the need to support infection prevention and control program.

The Indus health network (IHN) is a chain of hospitals in Pakistan with its all campuses providing free of cost care in different cities of Pakistan. The Infection control department (ICD) of Indus Network played a very active role during SARS COV 19 pandemic, providing 24/7 coverage.

PPE guidelines for Health care workers and compliance Monitoring

For the prevention of COVID-19 transmission many guidelines were published, i.e. Center of Diseases Control and prevention (CDC), World health Organization (WHO) and institute of National health Pakistan (INH). Institutional guideline of PPE for Indus health network was developed according to requirement of different departments and then was shared with all stakeholders along with the arrangement of PPE as well. In line with revision of the national and international guidelines, the PPE guidelines at IHN has also been revised thrice. The IHN was also involved in the procurement and distribution of essential elements along with the establishment of monitoring compliances of PPE at level of hospital units.

Clinical guideline for doctors and staff

ICD has developed many policies and SOPs in COVID context based on the national infection prevention and control (IPC) guidelines; training of staff in health care facilities and development of related material for health care workers.

Building policies

- Infection Control Department has developed following policies/Standard Operating Procedures with coordination of Infectious Diseases team.
- Rational use of PPE
- Cleaning and disinfection of COVID environment policy
- COVID quarantine home guidelines.
- Burial policy
- OPD/Clinic SOP
- Radiology SOP
- Admission office SOP
- COVID donning and doffing SOP
- Policy for exposed Health care workers
- Half face respirator usage SOP
- SOP for Ambulance cleaning and disinfection.
- SOP for suspected patient's admission in hospital
- SOP for operation theater

Translating policy into practice

The objective of Indus Health Network (IHN) management was to make sure the availability and proper use of PPE. Hospital management designate a PPE centralized counter to facilitate all clinical and non-clinical staff. All health care workers had an easy access to PPE.

To assess compliance to IPC guidelines first-hand, Infection control practitioners made repeated visits to COVID unit and COVID ER. On observation of any breaches, the one committing the act was educated on spot and observations and images shared amongst the heads of Health care professionals.

Online webinars and lecture

- a. IHN infection control department of The Indus hospital provided COVID 19 prevention education not only IHN staff but also facilitate different public and private hospital, pharmaceutical companies on their request.
- b. Arranged Webinar session for all campuses of IHN.
- c. Other private and public Hospital also asked to facilitate in infection control education to their staff, so we provide educational facilitation to many others hospitals health care workers.

Reinforcement of Hand Hygiene

ICD conducted Hand hygiene sessions for all workers of IHN, shared videos, messages, paste posters, provided hand washing stations, tissue towels, liquid soap. ICD also installed hand rubs at point of care, entrance of critical area, attendance machines, offices, schools, OPD etc.

SARS COV-19 infection in health care workers

As a frontline fighter of COVID battle, the health care workers were at risk of acquiring COVID infections not only from patients but from their colleagues also. Infection control department have established help desk for health care workers (HCWs), provide helpline numbers, counseling of health care workers and their families. Many grievance calls were received from staff due to COVID anxiety. Health care exposure policy was developed to support health issues of hospital staff.

Conclusion

SAR COVID 19 has warned us that infection prevention and control in hospitals are very important that ensures the safety of patients and healthcare workers while simultaneously decreasing the risk of spreading infection in the community. Pakistan needs to have a well-informed, knowledgeable and well equipped infection control program at every hospital that can perform surveillance of infections, manage outbreaks like SAR COV 19 as well as developing local based policies that can meet local requirements. A public-private partnership can be developed to enhance capacity in this aspect, collaborate in enhancing in infection control education, compare the HAIS infection rate, exchange the knowledge of resistance microbes and control outbreak effectively. Effective infection control practices will help in increasing the human safety and decrease the cost of treatment that will ultimately help government to spend money in any useful health project.

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