



Press Release

January 8, 2015

WHO Launches HKU-Verified Hand Hygiene Programme Globally

Hong Kong Breaks “Hand Sanitizing Relay” World Record

The World Health Organization’s (WHO) “First Global Patient Safety Challenge” has adopted Hong Kong’s record-breaking model of “Hand Sanitizing Relay” and will put the model verified by the University of Hong Kong (HKU) as the focus of the next global Hand Hygiene Day on May 5, 2015, with a view to promoting hand hygiene compliance and hence reduction of hospital infections all over the world.

Hong Kong made the first Guinness World Record on “Hand Sanitizing Relay” in May 2014, with 277 participants at the Hong Kong Baptist Hospital performing hand hygiene before two officials and approved witnesses.

“The team in Hong Kong is to be commended for initiating the “Hand Sanitizing Relay” exercise that started in a relatively small way locally. But after proper research, it has been recognised as a tool that can enhance healthcare all over the world through the WHO,” said Professor Didier Pittet, Director of Infection Control Programme and WHO Collaborating Centre on Patient Safety, University of Geneva Hospitals, Geneva, Switzerland. He will personally be present with a film crew at the relay’s anniversary ceremony, during which he will thank the team in Hong Kong for implementing the first attempt in 2014, now to be launched worldwide.

About the Research

Research conducted by the School of Public Health, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine of HKU has shown that the “Hand Sanitizing Relay” exercise was effective in increasing hand hygiene compliance to over 85% in 2014. The results of the study have been published in the *American Journal of Infection Control* and *F1000 Research Journal*.

“The Hong Kong Baptist Hospital encountered campaign fatigue after promoting hand hygiene for years. Last year, we tried a breakthrough with a “Hand Sanitizing Relay” with the aim of achieving Guinness World Record (GWR). During the continuous video recording, participating staff had to practise hard the 7 steps, thereby ensuring a mastery of the hand hygiene skills. Such practice has also evolved from an individual DIY (*Do it Yourself*) habit to a collective DIT (*Do it Together*) duty, such as nurses helping doctors,” recalled Dr Raymond Chen Chung-i, CEO of Hong Kong Baptist Hospital, on the impact of the GWR.

Dr Benjamin John Cowling, Associate Professor of the School of Public Health, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, HKU, said “Compliance with hand hygiene at hospitals is regularly assessed using trained auditors according to WHO protocols. Compliance rates increased significantly after the World Record event held in May 2014.”

Hand hygiene has been proven to be the most vital measure in infection control in hospitals. In 2005, the WHO launched the “First Global Patient Safety Challenge” in hospitals around the world. Professor Pittet of WHO led the programme from the start, and Hong Kong was selected to be one of the eight initial centres to pilot the programme.

One key issue in implementing hand hygiene is to maintain compliance, because it will not work effectively unless compliance exceeds 70%. With repeated messages and campaigns, a phenomenon called “Campaign Fatigue” can emerge, leading to difficulties in maintaining high levels of compliance. Professor Seto Wing-hong, Honorary Clinical Professor of the School of Public Health, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, HKU said, “Campaign fatigue is a major challenge, and breaking the World Record was a novel approach to overcome campaign fatigue and improve compliance with hand hygiene. Understanding campaign fatigue is essential not only for hand hygiene, but also for the promotion of appropriate healthcare in general.”

Background

HKU is the first organisation to conduct research on “Campaign Fatigue”, which is a major challenge in healthcare. After verifying the effectiveness of the hand hygiene programme, the 134 member states of WHO have formally pledged their support through their health ministries. As a result, May 5 is now designated as the World Hand Hygiene Day by the WHO. The WHO’s “First Global Patient Safety Challenge” has decided to adopt Hong Kong’s “Hand Sanitizing Relay” model and to use it for a worldwide record-breaking effort. This attempt will be the focus of the next Hand Hygiene Day on the May 5, 2015, the 10th Anniversary of the “First Global Patient Safety Challenge”.

Research Team

The research was conducted by Professor Didier Pittet, Director of Infection Control Programme and WHO Collaborating Centre on Patient Safety, University of Geneva Hospitals, Geneva, Switzerland, Professor Seto Wing-hong, Honorary Clinical Professor of the School of Public Health, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, HKU, Dr Raymond Chen Chung-i, Chief Executive Officer of Hong Kong Baptist Hospital, and Dr Benjamin John Cowling, Associate Professor of the School of Public Health, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, HKU.

Media Enquiries

For media enquiries, please contact Miss Grace Ng (Tel: 3917 9995 / 9107 1676) or Miss Pinky Yu (Tel: 3917 9306/ 6823 6796) of Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, HKU.

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