Editorial

The Role of Hospital Infection Control Committee

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Infections are one of the most common sources of morbidity and mortality. Infections are caused by various organisms and spread through various vectors. Weak defenses of the body, poor nutrition, bad personal and society habits, lack of knowledge, poor environment and abuse of antibiotics are important contributory factors toward high incidence and frequency of infections. Islam lays great importance on hygiene and cleanliness at all levels. This includes spiritual, mental and physical hygiene on one hand and social and environmental sanitation on the other hand! Quran clearly says that Allah loves those who are clean and pure. Naturally all aspects of cleanliness are part of Muslim life. Daily, five times Salah (Islamic prayers) play important role in imparting cleanliness at all levels. For physical cleanliness one performs thorough ablution with water five times a day. This rinses the dust and dirt from extremities and cleans mouth, nose and external ear. Similarly hand washing other than ablution is emphasized at many places e.g. before and after eating and after going to wash room. Whole body bath is highly encouraged and is mandatory at times. Regular nail cutting and removal of unwanted hair is highly recommended. As these are the acts of the Prophet (PBUH), their performance additionally earns divine reward. Noise and smell pollution is highly discouraged. Quran emphasizes on cleanliness of clothes as it lays great stress on wearing decent and nice dress while praying and as Muslims pray five times a day, one has to wear clean, nice and decent dress virtually all the time. Of course it does not have to be expensive.

Hospitals are places where the cure is sought and hence its Arabic name i.e. Mustashfa. The letter “M” stands for possession; in this case a site. “Ust” stands for seeking and “Shfa” stands for cure. However the hospitals themselves must not become a source of infections. The fact that a lot of sick patients, some with contagious diseases, are brought to the hospital and kept there, opens a door for spread of infection to the others including the caring physicians and nurses. Also the caring staff may transmit their infections to the patients. From the noble hands of physicians and nurses infection may spread from one patient to the other. Of course if the hands are not washed properly they may become the greatest source of spread of infection.

The Great Muslims Scientists founded the modern hospitals under the patronage of Great Muslim Khulafa or rulers! First ever hospital was built by Khalifa Walid in Baghdad, Iraq and the second hospital was built by Khalifa Haroon Rashid. When the Khalifa of Baghdad took the opinion of great Muslim physician Ar-Razi about the site of a proposed hospital, his reply was simple; hang large pieces of meat at different sites in the city and where the meat putrefies last, build the hospital there. Razi was fully aware of the infections, their spread and their contagious nature. Although he could not see the viruses and bacteria he described in great detail chicken pox and its protean manifestations and spread. Ibn-e-Sina was also aware of the unseen microbes causing diseases. Muslims were very meticulous about infections and postoperative care. They had invented the medicinal grade alcohol and other antiseptics. As a result all non Muslim dignitaries in Europe used to come for treatment in Qurtubah (Cordoba) Spain. When there were 100 hospitals in this city alone, there were none in the entire Europe which took 300 years afterwards to make the first hospital in Paris.

In order to prevent infection and in the line of Islamic teachings and injunctions on cleanliness and hygiene, one must have a system of constant vigilance and survey to take preventive measures to curb the spread of infections. For this purpose Infection Control Committees are constituted in hospitals.
This committee is comprised of representatives of pathologists, microbiologists, surgeons, physicians, nurses, waste disposers and administrators. The committee compiles policies, guidelines and makes frequent surveys. The surveillance nurses inform about the incidence of unusual and clustering of infections. The Hospital Infection Control Committee examines the situation and discusses the matter to control and contain the infections. It holds regular meetings to keep a check on various areas of the hospitals including wards, operating theater, dental department, Sterilization and Laundry, Waste Disposal System, kitchen, laboratories and outpatient areas. It also keeps an eye on trends of antibiotic use and emergence of resistance in microbes. The committee prepares its own Infection Control Manual suited for a particular hospital. The committee visits different sites and issues antibiotic guidelines. One of the important causes of spread of infections from the hospital to the community is the abuse of antibiotics. It has been shown by several studies that the amount of antibiotics used is directly proportional to the incidence of infections. Overuse and abuse of antibiotics lead to the development of resistance in bacteria that in turn becomes an important reason for spread of infections to not only the hospital patients but also to the community. Community acquired infections and Hospital acquired infections (Nosocomial Infections) are not watertight compartments. One can easily merge into another. Infections mean disability, discomfort to the patient as well as to the relatives and of course useless, painful economic burden. The Infection Control Committee constantly monitors not only infections but also the patterns of antibiotics use and issues guidelines to curtail unnecessary and inappropriate antibiotic use. The Infection Control Committee thus becomes one of the most important committees of the hospital that aims at making and keeping hospital a place of cure and peace.