“GERMS – DON’T GIVE THEM A HAND”

Andrea Buckles (C.T.1965) Senior Nurse, Infection Control, Royal Liverpool University Hospital recently retired. Andrea provides us with personal insight into her role in infection control, a role that highlights the importance of good team work.

A major part of infection control is education, of doctors, nurses, professional and ancillary staff as well as patients and their visitors. This article describes the launch of a campaign called “GERMS – DON’T GIVE THEM A HAND”.

The aim of the campaign was to provide quality patient information; provide better hand hygiene products for patients and staff; increase hand hygiene compliance and reduce hospital acquired infection.

All hospital staff were invited to an education day. The team undertook twelve sessions in total.

Andrea describes the first of those sessions…. In the education centre a large abstract image looking as though it was made of millions of pins was whirling and changing shape on the screen before me, to the well-known music of Chariots of Fire! If this doesn`t inspire the staff to wash their hands I thought, I don’t know what will! It was just like being in the movies,it was fantastic, the music played everyone in and everyone out.! We had slides and a film working too. The rest of my team were piling into the lecture theatre. They looked stunning in their campaign Tshirts.The biggest hand possible adorning their bosoms and underneath our campaign slogan – Germs Don`t Give Them A Hand” 1 had organised a photo of them the previous week decked out in this new uniform!

Well, in they came pushing our mobile work station (Jeremy`s Germ Mobile !) Billy in the Estates Department, converted an old trolley found in the basement. It looked just great, the title of our campaign riding high and little Jeremy Germs all over it. On top was our box, for checking hand washing with an ultra violet light, lots of personal alcohol gel dispensers, patient leaflets, staff badges and campaign posters. Jeremy was a very cute little germ with wiry legs and black spiky hair, which one of the teams mother (ex art teacher) had made. We made him our campaign mascot. We had two team members stationed at the doors to give out campaign flyers and ready to give out personal alcohol gel and badges when everything was over. Lights dimmed, movie music on, big deep breath and off we go!! On with our well rehearsed programme. Our education day was over before we knew it. Twelve sessions later, all of us tired, exhausted and with one or two hoarse voices, we discussed how things had gone. We all thought it could not have gone any better! Loads of staff attended, even medics,and said they had enjoyed it! We grabbed their attention with Jeremy germ before the more serious messages to come. They took on board recent research findings. Firstly, how having alcohol gel at the point of use (clip on personnel gel dispensers) increases hand washing Secondly, by patients feeling comfortable enough to remind staff “have you cleaned your hands” increases compliance by as much as 50%. They watched with keen interest the patient information film we had made. The film was about to be shown constantly on the free channel of all patient bedside televisions. We felt proud that the Royal Liverpool Hospital was the first hospital that had approached hand hygiene in this way. Smiles broke on viewers faces as Jeremy Germ danced on to the screen. They all listened carefully to the messages

1) how staff were expected to clean their hands

2) how patients could protect themselves and

3) that it was OK for patients to ask staff if we have cleaned our hands.

Afterwards they said they felt that the voice over with a gentle Liverpool accent would help the patients feel at ease. The simple script emphasising good and bad germs, together with Jeremy, made the film interesting and not frightening. Surprisingly staff did not mind the suggestions on how to respond if a patient asked them if they had washed their hands. The photos of a doctor smiling at a patient saying, “thanks for the reminder” certainly helped. Everyone agreed that if staff didn`t mind being reminded and that patients felt comfortable to ask if we have cleaned our hands, we could prevent many hospital acquired infections. After listening, watching, being reminded of best practice techniques and where to resource further information all the staff found it easy to sign up to wearing their personal yellow badge. Tomorrow we would start spreading our campaign message on the Germ Mobile to every part of the hospital.

After a six week campaign audit results showed:- Hand hygiene compliance in wards audited rose by 13%. Alcohol gel application rose by 50%. Quality information had been provided for patients and 67% of patients found the film helpful, 50% of patients said the film made them feel more comfortable asking staff if they have cleaned their hands, 83% of patients found the information reassuring, 50% of patients said the information in the film made them less worried. The Infection Control Team was awarded an NHS Innovation Award in the North West special commendation for innovative service delivery category. We were also short listed for Royal Liverpool & Broadgreen University Hospital Team of the Year and Health, Service Journal Awards, for patient safety.