

Hundreds of hospital patients line up for tests after possible infection

October 8 2009, By Diane Lade

Some of the 1,851 patients who had tests administered by a Broward General Medical Center nurse alleged to have knowingly violated infection control protocols will know within two weeks if they have contracted hepatitis or HIV, officials said Wednesday.

But others will have to wait six months, not knowing if they have a blood-borne infectious disease they could pass to others.

The additional time is required for those who had the cardiac chemical stress test from March 1 through Sept. 8, in order to allow for an [incubation period](#). The incidents involving the potentially contaminated single-use tubing and saline bags, which [hospital](#) officials said registered nurse Qui Lan admitted to using for multiple patients, stretch back to 2004.

The hospital has notified all affected patients and is paying for the blood tests, as well as for the six-month follow-up test.

More than 94 people have come into a counseling center set up in the Fort Lauderdale hospital since Monday, and another 1,400 have called the information hotline.

Many health experts are asking: How did Lan's behavior, which spanned five years until the hospital received an anonymous report and later suspended her, escape detection?

Broward General quality teams routinely check if nurses are properly following infection-control measures such as safely administering injections or frequently washing their hands, said hospital COO Alice Taylor. But installing a sterile IV line is so basic that most supervisors would never think a registered nurse couldn't do it properly, she added.

"We don't watch nurses change the sheets on the beds," Taylor said.

The hospital will consider if any changes need to be made as it continues to investigate the incident, Taylor said.

Joseph F. Perz, a health-care epidemiologist with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said sometimes hospitals "assume [health care workers](#) know better" when it comes to basic infection control practices. "But I think we would like to see more attention paid to reviewing the basics when it comes to delivering IV medications or injections," he said.

Fort Lauderdale Police continue to investigate Lan's actions after hospital officials filed a complaint with them Monday, a month after Lan resigned. No charges have been filed against the nurse.

Police said they believe Lan is out of the country. The Sun Sentinel reached Jack Braunstein, listed in Broward County records as her domestic partner, by telephone Wednesday. Braunstein referred all questions to attorney Allison Gilman. Gilman did not return the Sun Sentinel's calls to her office Wednesday.

Michael Flynn, a law professor at Nova Southeastern University in Davie, Fla., said investigators will likely focus on whether Lan deliberately reused medical supplies over a long period of time knowing it constituted a health risk.

"If it's true she admitted she knew what she was doing was wrong, that is an intentional act. And that has potential criminal implications," said Flynn.

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