

# Not all docs/nurses want to be asked about hand hygiene

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Although most health care workers appreciate the role of patients in preventing health care-associated infection, a considerable proportion are uncomfortable with patients asking about their hand hygiene, according to a letter published online Sept. 3 in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

(HealthDay)—Although most health care workers (HCWs) appreciate the role of patients in preventing health care-associated infection, a considerable proportion are uncomfortable with patients asking about their hand hygiene, according to a letter published online Sept. 3 in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

Yves Longtin, M.D., from the Infection Control Program and [World Health Organization](#) Collaborating Centre on [Patient Safety](#) in Geneva, and colleagues assessed HCWs' perceptions of a hypothetical patient participation program to improve staff compliance with hand hygiene. Two-hundred seventy-seven HCWs responded to an anonymous, confidential survey assessing attitudes and beliefs.

Forty-four percent of the respondents were physicians and 56 percent were nurses; 65 percent had more than 10 years' work experience. In the previous month, the researchers found that only 3 percent had been asked by a patient whether they had washed their hands before being cared for. Although nearly three-quarters (74 percent) believed that patients could help to prevent health care-associated infections, many HCWs did not support the idea of patients reminding them to perform hand hygiene (29 percent), and more than a third refused to wear a badge inviting patients to ask about hand hygiene (37 percent). Almost half (44 percent) admitted that if patients discovered they had omitted hand hygiene they would feel guilty, and 43 percent reported that they would be ashamed to admit having forgotten to wash their hands.

"This survey indicates that a nonnegligible proportion of HCWs do not endorse the concept of inviting patients to ask about hand hygiene," the authors conclude. "HCWs may prefer to keep patients in relative ignorance regarding appropriate [hand hygiene](#) behavior to avoid delicate situations."

**More information:** [Full Text \(subscription or payment may be required\)](#)

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