U.S. hospitals halve catheter infection rates: review

November 21 2016

(HealthDay)—U.S. hospitals have cut in half the number of potentially

deadly bloodstream infections linked to so-called central-line catheters since 2008. But, too many critically ill patients are still exposed to dangerous bacteria, a new review from *Consumer Reports* contends.

Central-line catheters deliver medication, nutrients and fluids to a patient through one intravenous line (IV). While often lifesaving, these lines can also harbor germs when not handled properly, and then transmit those germs directly into the bloodstream of a patient, the *Consumer Reports* researchers said.

Once the bacteria have a foothold in the body, they can spread quickly and widely, and cause organ failure. And some of these bacteria are particularly virulent because they are resistant to antibiotics. Among the most dangerous: methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).

To gauge how well U.S. hospitals are doing in preventing these life-threatening infections, *Consumer Reports* looked at the five-year track records of nearly 2,000 teaching hospitals.

"Because teaching hospitals are teaching our next generation of physicians, we think it's critical to monitor them closely," said Doris Peter, director of the Health Ratings Center at *Consumer Reports*.

"Our review of their performance on controlling central-line infections is very sobering," Peter said in a news release from the organization.

"Central-line infections are highly preventable and there are no excuses for poor performance on this metric," Peter added. "It's unfortunate to see so many well-known hospitals, some who tout their top rankings and awards, sitting on the sidelines of one of the biggest triumphs in patient safety."

Peter pointed out that "hospitals are moving in the right direction, but

progress is slowing and too many hospitals have not adequately addressed the problem over the past five years."

A safety checklist for central-line catheters—similar to one used by pilots prior to takeoff—was developed in 2001, and is still considered the gold standard, according to *Consumer Reports*. But not enough hospitals are following it, the new report said.

The good news is that central-line infection rates were sliced in half between 2008 and 2014, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Other hospital infection rates haven't moved much in recent years.

"It's one of the nation's greatest patient safety success stories ever," Dr. Arjun Srinivasan, associate director for Healthcare Associated Infection Prevention Programs at the CDC, said in the news release.

Still, close to 650,000 people develop infections while in U.S. hospitals each year, and 75,000 patients die, according to the CDC. Hospital-acquired infections are the eighth-leading cause of death, just behind diabetes, with central-line infections accounting for 5 percent of all hospital infections, the agency said.

While it's incumbent upon hospitals to provide safe environments for their patients, there are some things patients and their families can do to guard against central-line infections, according to *Consumer Reports*:

- Check on your hospital's safety record using reliable internet sources.
- Have a friend or family member act as your advocate, asking questions and taking notes.
- Keep a record of what doctors and nurses say, which drugs you get and what questions you have.

- Insist on clean hands. Ask everyone who enters your room if they've washed their hands with soap and water.
- Bring bleach wipes for bed rails, doorknobs, the phone and the TV remote, all of which can harbor bacteria.

More information: To read the full report on the best-performing and worst-performing hospitals, and to check on hospitals in your area, visit Consumer Reports.