

Initiative helps neurosurgical infections drop more than 80% in two years at Pittsburgh hospital

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When excess surgical site infections (SSIs) were detected among neurosurgery patients at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) Mercy in 2019, infection preventionist Katie Palladino, MPH,

CPH, CIC, partnered with a hospital neurosurgeon on a multidisciplinary quality and process improvement initiative that led to a steep drop in infection rates over a two-year period. Their successful initiative is being presented at the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology's (APIC's) Annual Conference in Orlando Florida, June 26-28.

Palladino and the surgeon began the initiative by reviewing the path of a surgical patient—from the first pre-op meeting to the surgery, to the patient's discharge from the hospital—observing practices and looking for opportunities where infections could arise. They also reviewed pre-surgical instructions for patients and found ways to improve information about [chlorhexidine gluconate](#) (CHG) bathing, nasal decolonization, and other important infection [prevention](#) practices.

The next step was a literature review of best practices for SSI prevention and the creation of a multidisciplinary team to engage around this initiative and determine the process measures that could be reported on a monthly dashboard.

"SSI prevention extends beyond the surgical suite—it was important for us to bring in the other groups like physical and [occupational therapy](#), [environmental services](#), and facilities management, so they could see their role in preventing infections, and then provide monthly updates on progress," said Palladino. "Getting patients on-board in their own infection prevention also proved to be a critical step in reducing SSIs and readmissions," she added.

Their effort resulted in an 87% drop in the surgeon-specific standardized [infection](#) ratio (SIR) from 2019 and 2021. The facility neurosurgery SIR decreased by 82% and neurosurgery-related 90-day and 30-day readmission rates decreased by 46% and 74%, respectively. Correspondingly, the hospital rating score improved from 55.9% to

60.2%. The hospital recommendation score rose from 55.4% to 62.8%.

"Surgical site infections are among the most common healthcare-associated infections," said 2023 APIC President, Patricia Jackson RN, MA, CIC, FAPIC. "UPMC Mercy's success is a testament to the power of multidisciplinary collaboration to achieve the best outcomes for patients."

More information: Conference: annual.apic.org/

Provided by Association for Professionals in Infection Control

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