

Hospitals track doctors' hand-washing habits

By Lisa Schencker
Chicago Tribune

Running from patient room to patient room, it can be surprisingly easy for doctors and nurses to forget to wash their hands, especially if they're dealing with an emergency. Hospitals have been working to boost hand hygiene for years, but health care providers still wash or sanitize their hands only about half as much as they should, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Now some Chicago area hospitals are trying a new tack to help them remember — tracking technology. The University of Chicago Medical Center, Elmhurst Hospital, Edward Hospital in Naperville, Gottlieb Memorial Hospital in Melrose Park and MacNeal Hospital in Berwyn are all investing in technology that can monitor hand washing and hand sanitizing — sometimes down to the individual employee — through electronic sensors. The new approach to hygiene comes as employers across a number of industries use technology to keep tabs

on worker activity. Some wonder whether hospital employees will chafe at being tracked. Questions also remain about whether it will reduce infections. But proponents say the hand hygiene technology is an effective way to hold hospital workers accountable for cleanliness and keep patients healthier. On any given day, about 1 in 31 hospital patients have an infection acquired while in the hospital or one developed after surgery. In 2015, there were about 633,300 health care-associated infections in acute care hospitals across the country, and about 72,000 patients with those infections died, according to the most recent CDC data. Good hand hygiene “truly is the No. 1 way to prevent the spread of infection,” said Annemarie Schmock, manager of infection prevention at Elmhurst Hospital. “If you’ve performed hand hygiene and done it well, we know that we’re mitigating that risk of transmission.” Elmhurst Hospital and Edward Hospital in Naperville installed technology made by

Ravenswood-based company SwipeSense in late fall. Employees who work with patients, including nurses, doctors, therapists, transporters and housekeepers, will all soon wear a square badge around their necks to track when they have — or haven’t — cleaned their hands when visiting patients. When an employee cleans his or her hands, a sensor below the soap or alcohol dispenser recognizes the badge and captures that data. Health care providers might need to clean their hands as many as 100 times in a 12-hour shift, before touching patients, after touching patients or their immediate environments, and after contact with blood, body fluids or contaminated surfaces, according to the CDC. Vivian Giordano, an advance team lead nurse, called the new sensors a good way to prevent infection, though she admitted that using so much sanitizer can dry her skin. “It kind of reminds staff not to fall behind on hand washing,” Giordano said. “Running in and out of the rooms, it’s

easy to forget.” Until now, the hospital, like many others, tracked hand hygiene through “secret shoppers,” employees who sat near patient rooms, taking note of which workers cleaned their hands and which didn’t. But that method captured only a small fraction of what was really going on, said Pamela Dunley, president and CEO of Elmhurst Hospital. “This is much more precise,” Dunley said. MacNeal Hospital has been using SwipeSense since 2016. When it first started testing it for the company, the hospital’s employees were cleaning their hands less than 30% as often as they should have, said Dr. Chuck Bareis, chief medical officer at MacNeal. Now the hospital has more than 70% compliance, he said. Gottlieb Memorial Hospital is in the process of installing a system made by Minnesota-based Ecolab that will allow it to track employees’ hand hygiene, and Loyola University Medical Center is piloting the same system. The University of Chicago Medical Center uses a system

made by Gojo Industries, the company behind Purell. That system does not track individual employees but records the number of times soap and sanitizer is dispensed and the number of times employees exit and enter patient rooms, said Emily Landon, the hospital’s medical director for infection control. When the hospital started using the system in 2014, employees were cleaning their hands only about 20% to 30% as often as they should, Landon said. Now, most of the hospital is at 50% to 60% compliance, with some units at 100% compliance, she said. On occasion, the hospital has caught workers cheating, such as by going from dispenser to dispenser to boost their numbers, Landon said. The hospital doesn’t use the data to discipline employees, but rather tracks compliance and lets them know when the numbers fall too low, she said. “People don’t make a conscious decision (not to clean), it’s just not a habit,” Landon said. That’s not to say, however, that such technologies are

foolproof, or beloved by all. An Atlanta-based company, Georgia-Pacific, plans next year to launch a product that will consist of a small hand sanitizer device that attaches to an employee’s uniform and can report data to the cloud. It will give employees hourly goals for hand sanitizing and measure how well they’re performing. It will not, however, track exactly where each employee cleans his or her hands, said Anna Handley, the company’s director of clinical development. “Clinicians do not like nor do they want to be tracked while they’re in the hospital,” Handley said. “It’s just not a very respectful approach.” Elmhurst Hospital has no plans to discipline employees based on hand hygiene data, though managers may talk to workers who seem to be having issues. Elmhurst conducts investigations when patients develop infections, and hospital leaders will look through the SwipeSense data as part of those investigations, Schmock said.

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301 S. Lake St.
Corner 3rd & Lake Side Stairs on Lake St.

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301 S. Lake St., Church Basement

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114 Self-Help Group Meetings

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Every Thursday
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Harvest Church
3720 Birch St. Baker City
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Primary Purpose Group
12 - 1:00pm
2620 Bearco Loop

TUESDAYS
Into Action Group
12 - 1:00 pm
Presbyterian Church
1308 Washington Ave.
(entry 6th & Spring St.)

Sunday Group
7 - 8:00 pm
2620 Bearco Loop

City of Elgin Greater Elgin Group
7 - 8:00 pm
St. Mary's Catholic Church
93 S 12 St., Elgin

WEDNESDAYS
Primary Purpose Group
12 - 1:00 pm
2620 Bearco Loop

Sunday Group
7 - 8:00 pm
2620 Bearco Loop

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5:30 p.m.
10801 Walton Rd.
Blue Springs Apartments
Community Room

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7 - 8:15 pm
63161 Gekeler Lane
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(Corner of McAllister & Gekeler)

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City of Cove Cove Group
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Baptist Church
707 Main St.

FRIDAYS
Primary Purpose Group
12 - 1:00 pm
2620 Bearco Loop

City of Elgin Elgin Group (Winter only)
6:00 PM
70564 Valley View Rd
(in shop)

SATURDAYS
Sunday Group
10 - 11:00 am
2620 Bearco Loop

Grande Ronde Valley Group
7 - 8:00 pm
Presbyterian Church
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