
INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Strengthening Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) in Rural Health Care Facilities: The SURMEPI-IPC programme



TB and HIV/AIDS are major contributors to the burden of infectious disease encountered in South African (SA) healthcare facilities (HCF). In addition, overcrowding and limited human and capital resources enhance transmission of infection. Although largely unquantified, the burden of healthcare-associated infections (HAI) in SA HCFs is thought to be substantial. Despite the need for robust infection prevention and control (IPC) programmes, only one independent Academic Unit for IPC (UIPC) is established, based at Tygerberg Hospital and Stellenbosch University (SU). Furthermore, a lack of IPC training opportunities, particularly for rural healthcare workers (HCWs) and a shortage of dedicated IPC practitioners hamper efforts to prevent HAIs. The identified gap in rural HCW IPC training was the motivation for the development of the SURMEPI-IPC programme.

The SURMEPI-IPC training initiative for rural healthcare

workers

The SURMEPI-IPC programme aims to increase numbers of rural HCW with IPC training, expand undergraduate medical teaching in IPC, and support the development of specialised IPC skills through post-graduate training. All IPC training activities are centred around the SU Rural Clinical School and its affiliated rural HCFs in the Cape Winelands District (CWD). In Year 2, four HCFs in the Breede Valley sub-district are participating in the SURMEPI-IPC initiative. A comprehensive baseline IPC audit was performed at these HCFs. Grounded in the findings, four tailor-made, contextually-appropriate IPC short-courses for rural HCW (Introduction to IPC for District Healthcare Managers; Introduction to IPC for Healthcare Workers, Basic Decontamination and Sterilization, and Train-the-Trainer in IPC) were designed. These are the first IPC courses to be offered in the rural context and to target a wide range of rural HCWs. After delivery of the courses, the four participating HCFs will be re-evaluated using the same IPC audit tool to measure the impact of the IPC training intervention (as shown in the scheme below.)



Feedback from the first rural “Introduction to IPC for Healthcare Managers” course

The demand for this course was overwhelming. A full complement of 25 participants attended and a second course will be delivered later in Year 2. Key topics included the role of IPC, national IPC policies, impact and cost of HAI, surveillance, HCF design, and legislative aspects of IPC. The course was very well evaluated with participants rating the content and execution highly (average rating 4.3/5). All 25 participants passed the course and were awarded an SU Certificate of Competence.

Two hospital managers offered feedback to the MEPI delegation at the Year 2 site visit. Below is an extract from the IPC Clinical Program Coordinator at Brewelskloof TB hospital (BKH):

"It is important for the SURMEPI funders to be informed of the valuable and positive impact the IPC course had on me and my approach to IPC management at BKH. What made the course valuable, was that it approached infection control in a simple and manageable way. I am an Infection control practitioner at my hospital, and it was always difficult to approach management with IPC measures that needed implementation. Mostly it was due to the IPC cost involved. I am so glad Professor Mehtar touched on this and indicated to the managers that attended the course the importance of IPC and how cost of IPC initially is expensive compared to the cost of not having IPC precautionary measures in place.

There are very few formal training available for managers with regards to IPC and IPC structures. Mostly managers do not know their role within the IPC structure/program. This course however has attended to this basic training requirement. Managers got a chance to see IPC through the eyes of a manager. As an Infection Control Co-ordinator, this was wonderful to see. I can now go to my supervisor, speak IPC, and he/she is able to understand where I am coming from.

This course is very valuable and I think important if we want to promote change-management with regards to infection control. This course has opened up new doors for us at BKH. I can sit at a table and instead of "fighting" with management for funds etc. for IPC, I now have managers who know their responsibilities towards IPC at BKH, they understand the importance of the IPC program, but most importantly, they now know that IPC has to do with patient safety, delivering a quality service in the most cost-effective way possible. I think that the course being presented locally was much better than attending the course in Cape Town. It is easier for the trainees; I personally felt more comfortable in known surroundings with people I deal with on a daily basis.

Once again, thank you very much for the IPC course for managers. It was an eye-opener, not just for myself but also for the other managers at BKH. I am hopeful that there will be more training on IPC in the future in our rural areas."

Expanding IPC training of rural healthcare workers

Since the successful inaugural rural IPC for District Healthcare Managers course, the SURMEPI-IPC programme has facilitated a further two IPC courses for rural HCWs, which were equally well-received. This MEPI-funded initiative is playing a leading role in strengthening IPC in rural HCFs.

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