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INTRODUCTION TO NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR SURVEILLANCE

Health care associated infections (HCAIs) are those infections that are not present or incubating at the time of admission to a healthcare program or facility, develop within a healthcare organisation or are produced by microorganisms acquired during admission.

In March 2004, the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care's Health Care Associated Infections Advisory Committee (HCAIAC) and Surveillance Working Party reached in principle agreement to the publication of a standard set of definitions for facilities to apply for local monitoring of specific HCAIs. The proposed definitions are for surgical site infections (SSIs), bloodstream infections (BSIs) and multi-resistant organisms (MROs).

Origin of the Definitions

The definitions were originally developed by the National Advisory Board of the Australian Infection Control Association based on the National Nosocomial Infections Surveillance Systems^{1,2}, the Nosocomial Infection National Surveillance System³ and from the Public Health Laboratory Service of the UK (PHLS)⁴.

How Should Infection Control Professionals (ICPs) Use The Definitions?

Infection Control Professionals (ICPs) are encouraged to develop local Surveillance Plans that target HCAIs of greatest local significance. The plans can also inform stakeholders of areas of activity and methodology. At this stage, ICPs are encouraged to limit surveillance to HCAIs among inpatient populations.

Should These Definitions Be Used For Comparison?

The proposed definitions are not designed to identify all infections. Rather, they are designed to flag problem areas which may require further detailed investigation. The definitions are designed for the purposes of infection surveillance, not diagnosis.

ICPs can consider using the definitions to compare data collected within their organisation over two or more discrete data collection periods. However, comparison of infection rates between institutions is not recommended nor is it particularly useful. Surveillance should be used for the purposes of identifying local problem areas and implementing appropriate policy and clinical interventions to improve the quality of care, not for external benchmarking.

How Will These Definitions Be Updated?

The Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care's Health Care Associated Infections Advisory Committee will review these definitions as necessary through a consensus process.

Comments regarding the definitions can be submitted to:

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