

Morning at Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust and a surgical recovery area is being decontaminated. It happens three times a day and is part of its zero tolerance approach to healthcare-associated infection.

TONY BEVAN, OPERATIONAL MANAGER OF THEATRES, ENDOSCOPY AND DAY CASE, HEREFORD HOSPITALS NHS TRUST:

“All the floors are scrubbed and then any water is sucked away. We have high dusting and low damp dusting which is obviously damp floor frames, wash hand basins, surface tops. I look at this as, if it’s clean enough for myself, for my wife and my family to come in, it’s clean enough for a patient.”

No one could doubt what’s expected of them in the hospital’s fight against infection... With seventeen hundred staff and well over two hundred thousand patients a year, the hospital could be a breeding ground for germs. By its own admission, it wasn’t always this clean...

MARTIN WOODFORD, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, HEREFORD HOSPITALS NHS TRUST:
“Infections were a problem at this hospital three or four years ago – you can just look at the statistics. They tell the story. What we’ve done is to say we’re going to eradicate infections – that’s our top priority in terms of making this the safest hospital in the UK. It’s not down to me, what we have done is to engage our staff in bringing about that change. And the recent numbers show that success - we’re virtually there in terms of eliminating MRSA, we’ve halved C diff rates in the last year, we will continue until we see zeros in the columns for the main infections.”

Dave Shellam is being screened for MRSA ahead of surgery – if he’s found to have it, he’ll be treated *before* coming into hospital.

DAVE SHELLAM, PATIENT: “Hereford did have a very bad reputation. I understand it was one of the worst in the country. But the way they have turned it round and what they’re doing now is absolutely marvellous. I wouldn’t have come into hospital if it hadn’t been done.”

CATHERINE DAVIES, HEAD OF NURSING, SURGICAL BUSINESS UNIT, HEREFORD HOSPITAL:

“The work that has gone on has improved our position markedly over the last eighteen months. For the general public though we need to ensure as an organisation that we’re open and inform them of those results so they’re aware that when they make a choice as to which to come for surgery they are aware of our results and know that they’re coming somewhere that has good infection control procedures and low infection rates. “

Patient swabs come here to the hospital’s laboratories – the screening process is a key aspect of targeted prevention measures.

ALISON JOHNSON, CONSULTANT, MICROBIOLOGIST, HEREFORD HOSPITALS NHS TRUST:

“The microbiology department is absolutely critical in the role of controlling infection in the hospital. It provides the technical support and back up to everything that happens on the wards. So for example this hospital was one of the first to introduce MRSA screening for all patients. We provide Clostridium difficile testing which enables us to treat patients early and isolate them early.”

On the wards – cleanliness is paramount, the hospital says, with air disinfectant filters and alcohol gel dispensers aplenty.

REPORTER: “Carol, how big a challenge has it been to change attitudes to infection control?”

CAROL HARRISON, WARD MANAGER, HEREFORD HOSPITALS NHS TRUST:
“Quite huge really because it’s a different way of working, everybody has different practices. On here now. It’s just day to day routine that hand-gelling, cleaning patients’ lockers and tables, we still challenge anybody that comes through the doors if they don’t gel their hands”

HAZEL BURKE, PATIENT:

“There’s an awful lot of scaremongering that does go on through newspapers. I have every faith now. I wouldn’t mind how many times I had to come back into this hospital because I know exactly how it’s run with regard to cleanliness.”

..And it’s that confidence that Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust aims to inspire as it continues its campaign against infection, with patients’ health it, it says, a top priority.