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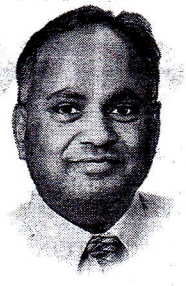
COMMUNITY CORNER

Take steps to prevent antibiotic resistance

Staphylococcus aureus is becoming more common in acute settings such as hospitals as well as long-term care facilities. It is a gram-positive bacterium that normally resides in 30 percent of people's noses. Most of the time it does not cause any harm but in certain conditions it can cause serious and fatal disease processes, including infection in the blood stream, abscesses, pneumonia, endocarditis (infection of heart valve) and osteomyelitis (infection of bones). Other infections may include cellulitis, boils and furuncles.



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According to the World Health Organization, antibiotic-resistant disease is a growing threat to global public health. An international review suggested that unless we find new ways to overcome resistant "Superbugs," the global death toll due to antibiotic-resistant cases will overtake that of cancer and exceed 10 million people affected per year by 2050. The Center for Disease Control estimates that in the United States, antibiotic resistance is responsible for at least 2 million illnesses and 23,000 deaths every year.

When SA bacterium becomes resistant to certain antibiotics then they are called Methicillin-resistant staph aureus (MRSA) and consequently become resistant to Vancomycin, resulting in Vancomycin Resistant Staph Aureus (VRSA). Treatment in these cases compiles complications and increased cost of care. Patients most susceptible to MRSA include those with weakened immune systems, open wounds, catheter or intravenous insertion, and burns or cuts to skin surfaces.

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The 5 C's that cause the spread of Staphylococcus aureus are as follows; Crowding, Contact (skin to skin), Compromised or open skin, Contaminated items, and Cleanliness deficits.

Prevention is the key to management of this infection. Some of the steps include careful hand washing and keeping wounds covered. According to the CDC, alcohol-based hand sanitizer significantly reduces the number of bacteria on the skin. When healthcare workers' hands are visibly soiled, they should wash them with soap and water.

SA or the more resistant MRSA can easily be removed from household items by using the proper cleaner. Cleaners purchased in the store will list the bacteria or viruses that it kills on the label. Looking at the label can help when picking a cleaner that will kill SA or MRSA, such as Lysol. Washing items with regular laundry detergent and drying in a hot dryer will also kill it.

In recent studies, researchers at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark have isolated a gene that may contribute to antibiotic resistance in two global Superbugs. Studies show how such a discovery could lead to a helper drug with the potential to restore the susceptibility of resistant bacteria to antibiotics.

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Dr. Anis Ansari is Board certified in internal medicine and nephrology.

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