

PRESS STATEMENT

Infection control in hospitals is focus for experts on the 3rd International Day for Fighting Infection

23 APRIL 2010: Hospital acquired infections are the focus for the 3rd International Day for Fighting Infection, being marked on St. George's Day, as experts meet to look at the evolution of infection control in hospitals.

In Europe an estimated three million cases of hospital acquired infections (HAI) occur annually and 50,000 are fatal. Such infections remain a crucial public health threat today with a rising numbers of immuno-compromised people including transplant patients, HIV positive and the elderly who are more susceptible to infections. And the infections are increasingly difficult to manage because of growing antibiotic resistance.

Speaking at an event organized by The European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID), Professor Giuseppe Cornaglia, President of ESCMID, stressed; "Although healthcare acquired infections are largely preventable, for many patients a trip to the hospital can result in dangerous and lingering infections. But there is much more that can be done to tackle such infections, from hand hygiene to screening, targeted cleaning, proper vaccination of staff and use of sterile techniques, all of which will save lives and money."

A range of potentially fatal infections are prevalent in European hospitals today at a time of increasing antibiotic resistance. But rates across Europe vary greatly. For example, one of the so called "superbugs", *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, which often grows on medical devices and can cause pneumonia, septicaemia and urinary tract infections, is an important cause of antibiotic-resistant infections among hospital patients. In Greece in 2008, 46% of patient samples of *P aeruginosa* were multidrug resistant (ie, resistant to three or more antibiotics), compared with 1% in Sweden.

MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is among the deadliest hospital infections. The UK has one of the highest rates in Northern Europe with MRSA accounting for around 40% of all *Staph aureus* bloodstream infection, compared with just 1% in the Netherlands and Norway.

But ESCMID urges healthcare professionals, governments and the general public that improvements are possible. "With a combination of rigorous hygiene and infection control protocols, the prudent use of antibiotics and common sense measures by hospital staff and patients alike the rates of such infections and mortality can be significantly reduced," said Professor Cornaglia.

The ESCMID conference to mark the International Day for Fighting Infection- *Hospitals and Infectious Patients Throughout the Centuries* – is being held on 23 April in Florence and is organized in cooperation with the International Society of Chemotherapy (ISC) and the International Society of Infectious Disease (ISID), and supported by *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*.

The European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases is a non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of infection-related diseases. This is achieved by promoting and supporting research, education, training, and good medical practice.

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