



Research Article

HABITS OF STETHOSCOPE CLEANLINESS TO PREVENT NOSOCOMIAL INFECTIONS

*Dr. Angshuman Jana, Dr. Arijit Majumdar, Dr. Jayeeta Mitra, Dr. Anirban Jana,
Dr. Soumali Biswas and Dr. Babita bag

IIT campus, Khargapur; West Bengal India

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 28th December, 2014
Received in revised form
20th January, 2015
Accepted 26th February, 2015
Published online 31st March, 2015

Keywords:

Staphylococcus aureus,
Escherichia coli,
Acinetobacter baumannii.

ABSTRACT

Nosocomial infections remain a significant hazard for hospitalized patients. Stethoscopes because of their universal use by medical professionals can be a potential source of nosocomial infections. This study was undertaken to determine the stethoscope-cleaning practices among medical health providers, to show whether the stethoscope is a potential source of nosocomial infection; and to compare the effectiveness of common antiseptics (i.e. 70% isopropyl alcohol) in disinfecting stethoscopes. Health care providers were asked how often they clean their stethoscopes. Results show that only 4.5% of health care providers (3 of 66) cleaned their stethoscope each day and no one clean it between examining each patient. To find out the bacterial contamination of stethoscopes used by health-care staff. Swab samples were taken from the surface of the diaphragm of the stethoscopes used by health personnel and were inoculated on to bacteriological and mycological media. For identification of the microorganisms, conventional methods and Vitek2 (Biomérieux) were performed. We found bacterial and fungal contamination on 92 (76%) of the stethoscopes. 15 out of 90 (16.3%) had potential pathogens including methicillin susceptible *Staphylococcus aureus* (5), methicillin resistance *Staphylococcus aureus* (4), *Escherichia coli* (3), *Acinetobacter baumannii*, *Acinetobacter haemolyticus* and *Enterococcus* spp. The statistical difference between the two groups in terms of pathogen and microorganism isolation was not determined ($p > 0.05$). Although stethoscopes are uncritical medical devices, they could contain pathogenic microorganisms and they might be a potential source of hospital acquired infections. This contamination can be greatly reduced by cleansing with soap and water, 70% isopropyl alcohol. We commend the disinfection of stethoscopes regularly. The effect of disinfection of stethoscope on the growth of microorganism has been evaluated by ODD'S Ratio and it was found that cleanliness of stethoscope has significant effect in controlling growth of microorganism. This inference is further strengthened by using chi square statistic which proved that at $p < 0.001$, the disinfection of stethoscope significantly reduced the growth of microorganism. The growth of individual microorganisms however, can be assessed using chi square statistic and significant effect of stethoscope cleanliness was attained. Paired t test was applied on the set of data to compare the mean effect of stethoscope cleanliness which was not significant in the present case ($p < 0.001$ and < 0.05).

Summary: This prospective surveillance has aims to identify stethoscope hygiene habits among hospital medical persons in a Tertiary care teaching hospitals in India. We collect swab from the surface of stethoscope diaphragm after completing the ward visiting end of the each day from the junior and senior resident doctors over first six months. On the next six months resident doctors are using in house stethoscope of the ITU pre disinfection with isopropyl alcohol in between in each patient by the nurse. The swab taken from the stethoscope showing growth of various pathogenic microorganisms. A total 63 junior residents are followed over one year.

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INTRODUCTION

Nosocomial infection (NIs) is one of the major problem and huge burden over healthcare system affecting both developed and developing countries alike. Within India another study showing HAI rate 8.03%. (Epidemiology of hospital, 2009) Furthermore, the monitoring of

HCAIs remains a key indicator of quality and safety within care systems. (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 2009) In a previous study showing that 15-30% of all HCAIs could have been prevented had hospital staff undertaken simple improvements in hygiene. (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2000) To date, training and awareness campaigns have focused on the role of good hand hygiene.

*Corresponding author: Dr. Angshuman Jana,
IIT campus, Khargapur, West Bengal India.

Previous studies have reported convincing evidence that improvements in hand hygiene reduce rates of HCAs. (Allegranzi *et al.*, 2009) This has led to many countries financing initiatives at government level to implement nationwide campaigns for the education and implementation of hand hygiene programmes and setting national targets for the reduction in HCAs. In India many training and awareness campaign have focused on the role of good hand hygiene and implement nationwide campaigns for the education and hand hygiene programmes and setting national targets for the reduction in HCAs. (Pittet *et al.*, 2000; O'Grady *et al.*, 2002)

However, poor hand hygiene is not the sole means by which infections spread; hospital equipment can also pose an infection risk. Since the original finding of stethoscopes contaminated with staphylococci by Gerken *et al.* in 1972, there has been repeated evidence showing that stethoscopes often harbour bacteria and could potentially spread HCAs. (Gerken *et al.*, 1972) Despite this, little attention has been given to this common piece of medical equipment within a clinical or educational setting. To combat this, daily cleaning of stethoscopes has been shown to reduce the number with bacterial contamination from >90% to <35%. Alcohol-based preparations and washing the stethoscope head with soap and water can both significantly reduce colonization and subsequent bacterial growth. (O'Grady *et al.*, 2002) However, it has been suggested that medical students may be deficient in their knowledge of this area and consequently fail to clean their stethoscopes regularly. Washing the stethoscope diaphragm with alcohol based preparation can significantly reduce colonization and subsequent bacterial growth. (Uneke *et al.*, 2008)

Medical personnel however, are deficient in their knowledge in this area and consequently clean their stethoscope regularly and in between examining each patient. The aim of the present study is to determine current stethoscope hygiene habits among medical personnel in an Indian setting and correlate this with a number of factors likely to influence nosocomial infection. Relation between nosocomial infection and organisms found in stethoscope were established and used further targeted intervention to improve cleanliness in the clinical environment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study population

The study population consisted of junior resident in the hospital chosen due to their clinical exposure in the hospital environment. The study fulfilled ethical guidelines issued by the hospital ethical committee and we did not need to seek further independent ethical approval. The stethoscopes used by all personnel in the department were not included. Diaphragm of the stethoscopes were swabbed with sterile normal saline solution and immediately sent for culture using 3ml of Trypticase Soy Broth (TSB). All swabs inoculated in the Trypticase Soy Broth (TSB), were immediately placed on blood agar and MacConkey Agar plates and incubated at 37°C for 24-48 hours. Another culture done over Sabouraud dextrose agar (SDA) for 2-3 weeks to see the fungal growth. All growth was identified using standard biochemical techniques with conventional methods and Vitek 2 (Biomérieux). The methicillin resistance of *Staphylococcus aureus* was investigated by using 30 µg oxacillin disc (Oxoid) according to CLSI standardization (Wayne, 2007) (Wayne, 2007).

A set of questionnaire were designed using Likert-scale questions, Junior residents were asked how often (on average) they cleaned their stethoscope while on clinical placement and their responses have been reported in Table 1.

Table 1.

Frequency of stethoscope cleaning	No (%)
Never	7 (10.6)
Once in a year	25 (37.8)
Once in a month	23 (34.8)
Once in a week	8 (12.1)
Once in a day	3 (4.54)
Between each patient	0 (0)

Table 2. Microorganism isolated from stethoscopes of HCW

Microorganism	May 2012- Oct 2012 Number of patients (433)	Oct 2012- April 2012 Number of patients (416)
No growth	65 (15.0)	308 (74.0)
<i>S. epidermidis</i>	216 (49.8)	55 (13.2)
<i>Bacillus</i> spp.	51 (11.8)	17 (4.1)
<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	24 (5.5)	4 (0.96)
MRSA	9 (2.1)	3 (0.7)
<i>Corynebacterium</i> spp.	15 (3.5)	6 (1.4)
<i>E. coli</i>	5 (1.1)	1 (0.2)
<i>Klebsiella</i>	3 (0.7)	0 (0)
<i>A. baumannii</i>	8 (1.8)	2 (0.5)
<i>Enterococcus</i>	19 (4.4)	5 (1.2)
<i>Candida</i> spp.	9 (2.1)	7 (1.7)
<i>Aspergillus</i>	7 (1.6)	3 (0.7)
<i>Penicillium</i> spp.	2 (0.5)	1 (0.2)

Paired *t* test results

P value and statistical significance:

The two-tailed P value equals 0.9494

By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant.

Confidence interval:

The mean of Group One minus Group Two equals 1.67

95% confidence interval of this difference: From -54.80 to 58.14

Intermediate values used in calculations:

$t = 0.0650$

$df = 11$

standard error of difference = 25.656

Table 3. microorganism isolated from stethoscope

Sample collection	With growth	Without growth
121	92	29

Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were performed using Pearson's Chi square test, ODD ratio, p value and results were significant at $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.001$. RESULTS: Our study was done in a teaching hospital, where every day in average 3-4 Junior residents were present to cover a 25 bedded ITU. According to the previous questionnaire anyone disinfect their stethoscope on examining each patient. We collect swab sample at the end of the day from the stethoscope of each resident doctor. After six month, total four hundred thirty three samples were collected, which were proceeding further microbiologically. Out of total sample 155 showing no growth and the rest of were showing growth. Thereafter, we have changed our policy and involve the nurses who disinfect the stethoscope, diaphragm by isopropyl alcohol in each time after using it. After another six month a total 418 samples were collected, out of which 328 showing no growth.

DISCUSSION

In one of the previous study showing that 100% of stethoscopes sample from the health care workers found contaminated with CONS and other bacteria. After cleaning with normal saline, isopropyl alcohol were shown to significant reduction of colonization. (Marinella *et al.*, 1997). Our study involve participation of both junior residents and nurses and proof that After cleaning with isopropyl alcohol, bacterial colony counts were shown to be significantly reduced. Our study used a different methodology to show that stethoscopes can be a possible source of pathogenic organisms like E.coli, Klebsiella sp., Acinetobacter sp., Staphylococcus aureus, Enterococcus.

Though these organisms are in very few in number <5% and we were not able to prove in our study that stethoscopes directly result in infection to patients but are also commonly found in some device associated infection in same institute studied by same author. It can be reduced to <1% by use of disinfectant like 70% isopropyl alcohol before examining each patients. (Francis Marie *et al.*, 2000). The other risk likewise, would be the possible dissemination of multi-resistant organisms that may be man if estinal ater out break as has been seen in hospital end emicstraced to the use of contaminated ther mometers, blood pressure cuffs or gloves along with stethoscope. (Saunders *et al.*, 2013)

Conclusion

Stethoscopes are a reservoir of infectious agents that might cause nosocomial infections. Although, the fact that even 4-5 minutes contact with patients skin have been shown to transfer organisms to the stethoscopes indicate that strategies to decrease contamination of stethoscopes should be developed. Most of the infection control education is working well for Handwashing and barrier protection but teaching in other areas may be lacking as illustrated here with stethoscope cleanliness. Although most patients might not be especially prone to infection after contact with contaminated stethoscope in general ward but those with open wounds like patients with burns, like ITU as in our study place where most of the patient are in high risk are also prone to get infection from stethoscope. This study is offered to raise awareness and highlight the issue in important areas of stethoscope cleanliness and stimulate further research into the role of stethoscope as possible transmission of hospital acquired infection and transmission of pathogenic microorganisms and drug resistance. The limitation of our study involves there latively small number of stethoscopes cultured, making us unable to use statistical means to conclude if there is assign if I cant difference in the stethoscope-disinfecting practices of the different medical personnel in our institution. None of the medical personnel surveyed clean their stethoscopes after seeing a patient or even daily. The residents seem to practiced is infection of their stethoscopes more frequently than the other groups surveyed.

Alcohol was the preferred agent used by medical personnel for cleansing their stethoscopes.

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