The Review Of
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Infection Control And Safety Practices In Nursing And Dental Care Settings: An Interprofessional Perspective

Sultan Dhaifallah Alanazi[1] , Marwan Bandar Aldossary[2] , Salha Ramathan Ibrahim Alenizi[3] , Taraf Ayad Alosaimi[4] , Amani Ali Darwesh[5] , Aminah Ali Bakeet Alyami[6] , Mona Hadi Hdadi[7] , Marwah Saad Abdullah Al Khathlan[8] , Abdulrahman Muraybid Eid Alanzi[9] , Nadiyah Mohammed Alharbi[10]

[1]Qassim Health Cluster
[2]Al-Izdihar Primary Health Care
[3]North Riyadh Dental Clinic
[4]Dental Complex North Riyadh
[5]North Riyadh Dental
[6]Bader 1 Care Center
[7]Ateika
[8]Dental Complex North Riyadh
[9]Qassim Health Cluster
[10]Dental Complex North Riyadh

Abstract

Infection control and safety practices are fundamental to guaranteeing excellent healthcare provision and protecting patients and healthcare workers workers. Nursing and dental care settings present shared and unique risks for healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) due to frequent patient contact, exposure to blood and body fluids, and the use of invasive and aerosol-generating procedures. Recent evidence from Saudi Arabia and other regions underscores continuous gaps in infection control knowledge, compliance, and occupational safety among nursing and dental professionals. This review analyzes infection control and safety practices in nursing and dental care settings from an interprofessional perspective, focusing on standard precautions, occupational hazards, education and training, and joint safety culture. Strengthening interprofessional infection control strategies are vital for reducing HAIs, boosting patient safety, and supporting workforce well-being.

Introduction

Healthcare-associated infections remain a major public health concern worldwide, playing a major role in patient morbidity, prolonged hospital stays, and rising healthcare expenses. Nursing and dental professionals are among the most exposed healthcare workers due to their direct and continuous contact with patients and their routine performance of invasive procedures. In dental care, aerosol-generating interventions and exposure to saliva and blood elevate the risk of cross-infection, while nursing practice involves multiple infection-prone activities such as wound care, catheterization, and medication administration.

Studies conducted in Saudi Arabia have demonstrated variable adherence to infection control protocols in both nursing and dental settings, with documented gaps in knowledge, training, and implementation. This evidence stresses the necessity for combined, interprofessional approaches to infection prevention and safety. Viewing infection control as a shared responsibility across disciplines is essential for strengthening medical systems and enhancing patient results.

Infection Risks in Nursing and Dental Care Settings

Exposure to Infectious Agents

Nurses and dental professionals face continuous exposure to pathogenic microorganisms, including blood-borne viruses, respiratory pathogens, and oral bacteria. In dental clinics, aerosols generated during procedures facilitate the transmission of infectious agents, while needle-stick injuries pose occupational risks. Studies from Saudi dental settings report a high prevalence of needlestick injuries among dental assistants, reflecting deficiencies in safety practices and reporting systems.

In nursing environments, particularly in hospital and intensive care units, inadequate adherence to infection prevention guidelines has been linked to increased risks of HAIs. Research among Saudi nursing staff has identified gaps in knowledge related to specific infections, such as Clostridioides difficile, which may jeopardize patient safety if inadequately managed.

Standard Precautions and Infection Control Measures

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is universally recognized as the fundamental element of infection prevention. Despite explicit protocols, compliance remains inconsistent across medical facilities. Evidence from Saudi hospitals and dental clinics suggests that suboptimal hand sanitation procedures persist, frequently due to workload pressures, insufficient training, or a lack of monitoring.

Personal Protective Equipment

The appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE) is critical for preventing occupational exposure to infectious agents. Dental professionals are particularly reliant on masks, eye protection, and face shields due to aerosol exposure, while nurses require PPE during invasive procedures and contact with bodily fluids. Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed improved awareness of PPE use among dental staff and highlighted disparities in the consistent application of safety procedures.

Environmental Cleaning and Instrument Sterilization

Inadequate disinfection of clinical environments and improper sterilization of instruments increase the risk of cross-contamination. Research in private dental clinics in Saudi Arabia has identified variations in compliance with sterilization standards, underscoring the importance of uniform protocols and scheduled reviews across healthcare facilities.

Occupational Health and Safety

Occupational hazards such as needlestick injuries, chemical exposure, ergonomic strain, and psychological stress affect both nursing and dental professionals. Saudi-based studies indicate that a significant proportion of dental staff experience needle-stick injuries, often underreported due to fear of blame or insufficient awareness of reporting systems. Similarly, nursing staff encounter difficulties associated with to heavy workloads and insufficient institutional support for occupational safety.

Adopting comprehensive occupational health programs, including vaccination, post-exposure management, and injury surveillance, is essential. Cross-professional teamwork improves these efforts by promoting shared learning and consistent safety protocols throughout disciplines.

Education, Training, and Competency Development

Education and training are central to improving infection control compliance. Evidence from Saudi Arabia shows that healthcare workers who receive structured infection control training exhibit better adherence to safety practices. However, several studies report that a substantial proportion of dental assistants and laboratory technicians lack formal infection control manuals or ongoing training opportunities.

Integrating interprofessional education into nursing and dental curricula can strengthen shared competencies and promote a unified understanding of infection prevention responsibilities.

Simulation-based training and regular competency assessments have been shown to improve knowledge retention and practical compliance.

Cross-disciplinary Collaboration and Safety Culture

A strong culture of safety is a key determinant of effective infection control. Multidisciplinary cooperation between nursing and dental teams enhances communication, minimizes mistakes, and supports consistent implementation of infection prevention guidelines. Studies examining cross-departmental practices in Saudi healthcare institutions reveal gaps in coordination and protocol standardization, strengthening the need for unified infection control frameworks.

Leadership support, multidisciplinary safety committees, and shared accountability mechanisms are critical for promoting a cooperative safety culture. When infection control is embedded in organizational values, healthcare workers tend to engage more in safe practices and report safety incidents.

Consequences for Practice and Policy

Healthcare organizations should adopt integrated infection control policies that cover both nursing and dental care environments. National health authorities and policymakers should prioritize standardized guidelines, consistent professional development, and monitoring systems that support interprofessional practice. Aligning infection control strategies with wider healthcare reforms boosts patient safety and protects the workforce.

Conclusion

Infection control and safety practices are fundamental elements of quality nursing and dental care. Evidence from Saudi Arabia emphasizes continuing challenges related to knowledge gaps, occupational hazards, and inconsistent adherence to infection prevention protocols. An interprofessional approach that emphasizes teamwork, education, and mutual responsibility is critical for addressing these challenges. Strengthening coordinated infection control practices between nursing and dental professionals will improve patient safety, protect healthcare workers, and contribute to more durable healthcare systems.

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