Hospital Maid: A Worker at Risk of Contracting Swine Flu

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It is well accepted that medical personnel are at higher risk of contracting swine flu.¹ Preventive medicine practice seems to be an effective means for coping with the problem. However, not all personnel are well educated. Many of those who work in hospital have a poor basic knowledge of infection control.² Herein, I would like to bring your attention to hospital maids—a group of workers who despite of being at high risk of contracting swine flu, are usually forgotten.

In many countries, hospital maids have to pass certain educational courses informing them of occupational hazards they may encounter during their job. However, passing these courses is not obligatory in all countries and there are many health care centers where education of such groups is overlooked.

In our health care facility—a 30-bed general medical ward with an average turnover of three patients per day—there are several hospital maids at work. One of these maids, a 38-year-old woman presented with the chief complaint of flu-like symptoms. The patient was first diagnosed with upper respiratory tract infection. However, she got worse and returned to the hospital two days later with severe pneumonia. At this time, she was diagnosed with novel H1N1 influenza infection. Although like other people, the maid might have caught the flu from other sources, since we had 1–2 admissions of cases per week with novel H1N1 flu to our ward, we presumed that she contracted the disease from one of the admitted patients, probably for lack of knowledge on how to work in such a hazardous area.

Besides the skilled medical personnel working in a hospital, there are other workers with lower level of educations—hospital maid is an example. These lay workers, like other personnel working in a health care center, are at higher risk of contracting H1N1 influenza. This underlines the need for establishing educational courses on basic knowledge about infection control and universal precautions for lay medical workers. These low educated medical personnel should not be forgotten. There should be a standard to include an acceptable educational course in the training program for these personnel.
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References


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