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Hand hygiene your right in hospital

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The patients registering with a leading private healthcare provider in the capital these days enjoy a special right. They can make their nurse or doctor wash hands if the latter have not already done so before handling the patient concerned.

The move is not simply off-the-cuff. It is rooted in scientific research which proves hand hygiene can reduce Healthcare Associated Infections by half. Hand-washing remains, by far, the easiest, cheapest and the most-violated patient safety norm across hospitals in the country - one reason why some medical establish-

ments are now asking patients to demand hand hygiene as a right in hospital settings.

"Hand washing is, in fact, the primary measure to reduce all hospital infections and we implement it as a norm. We have told all patients they are free to ask doctors and nurses to wash the hands before handling them," Dr Arati Verma, chief of medical excellence programmes, Max Healthcare yesterday told The Tribune. Max is partnering with the Government and the WHO for the implementation of patient safety policy in the country.

The WHO norms on the subject are the key in this direction. They tell the doctors when to wash hands (patients also need to be careful about these issues). "You

must wash hands before touching a patient, before the cleaning and aseptic procedures, after body fluid exposures, after touching a patient and after touching the patient surroundings," state WHO guidelines on patient safety, which will now form part of the patient safety and hospital infection control policy, the Health Minister announced on Tuesday.

As regards medical procedures - surgical interventions remain the riskiest of all; patient identification is the key to avoiding them. "You have to first make sure that the patient on the operation table is the one who needs to be operated. Identity check before the commencement of surgical intervention is a must," Dr S. Gupta, head, hos-

pital administration. AIIMS., said.

In the developed world, half of all harmful events (miscommunication, wrong medication, and technical errors) affecting patients in hospitals are related to surgical care and services. Rates of death following major surgery could range from 0.4 per cent to 10 per cent. Estimating the impact of these rates, at least one million patients would die annually during or after an operation.

With evidence that half of the surgical harms are preventable if standards of care - like checklists - are used and hand hygiene adhered to, WHO's surgical check list is a must before an operation.

It tells the lead surgeon to ask some basic questions before mak-

ing an incision on the patient: "Has the patient identified himself? Are the anaesthesia and medication checks complete? Is pulse oximeter on the patient working? Does the patient have a known allergy or a difficult airway? Are all members of the operation team present?"

Most of the leading government and private hospitals are following this check list - a potential weapon against surgical complications that can cause disability or prolonged stay in three to 25 per cent of hospitalised patients. These rates would mean that at least 7 million patients annually may have post-operative complications if hospitals were to ignore patient safety norms and patients were to ignore their rights to safe medical care.