## EHFG 2013: 80.000 PATIENTS A DAY CONTRACT HEALTHCARE-ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS IN EUROPE

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*On any given day, about 80 000 patients in European hospitals have at least one healthcare-associated infection. This amounts to an estimated total of 3.2 million patients each year. Many of these infections could be prevented by sustained, multifaceted infection prevention and control programmes, ECDC Director Marc Sprenger told the European Health Forum Gastein. This would also unburden Europe’s strained healthcare budgets.*

**Bad Hofgastein, 3 October 2013** – “Healthcare-associated infections pose a major public health problem and a threat to European patients: ECDC estimates that on any given day, about 80 000 patients, i.e. one in 18 patients, in European hospitals have at least one healthcare-associated infection,” Dr Marc Sprenger, Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), said today at the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). Overall, this amounts to an estimated total of 3.2 million patients (95% confidence interval: from 1.9 to 5.2 million) each year.

At the EHFG, experts discussed the first ECDC EU-wide point prevalence survey of healthcare-associated infections (HAI) and antimicrobial use in European hospitals. The large-scale study underlines the scope of a problem that “all healthcare systems in Europe need to be able to tackle”, according to Dr Sprenger.

“Resilient and Innovative Health Systems for Europe” is the slogan for this year's EHFG. More than 550 participants from some 45 countries are attending Europe's most important health policy conference in Bad Hofgastein to exchange views on key issues affecting European health systems.

**Call for co-ordinated action**

“Many of these infections could be prevented by sustained, multifaceted infection prevention and control programmes, including surveillance of healthcare-associated infections. Such programmes, as well as prudent use of antibiotics, will help all actors involved to protect the patients of European hospitals,” Dr Sprenger added. “Protecting hospital patients from healthcare-associated infections is a joint task. Policy makers, hospital managers and authorities at EU and national level, as well as patients themselves, need to cooperate in this shared responsibility”.

In 2011 and 2012, ECDC coordinated the first EU-wide point prevalence survey (PPS) to collect data on HAI and on antimicrobial use in a total of more than 1,000 hospitals from 30 countries (all EU Member States, Norway and Iceland). It is the largest ever-performed survey on HAIs and antimicrobial use performed in European hospitals.

According to the survey, the prevalence of HAIs was the highest among patients admitted to intensive care units (ICUs) in these European hospitals, where 19.5% patients had at least one. The most common types of HAI in these ICUs were respiratory tract infections and bloodstream infections. Patients in this group continue to be at higher risk of acquiring a HAI even when they are discharged to general wards in the hospital.

**Increasing spread of antimicrobial resistance**

The increasing spread of carbapenem-resistant Gram-negative bacteria in several European countries and the persistent presence of other well-known hospital pathogens such as MRSA and Clostridium difficile were shown in the ECDC study. The survey also confirms the large proportion of patients that receive antimicrobial agents while being hospitalised. ECDC estimates that more than 400,000 patients, i.e. one in three patients, receive at least one antimicrobial agent on any given day in European hospitals.

The threat posed by HAIs should not be underestimated, Dr Sprenger cautioned: „Although some of these infections can be treated easily, others may more seriously affect a patient’s health, increasing their stay in the hospital, requiring further surgical intervention or prolonged treatment with antimicrobials causing considerable distress to these patients.”

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