



News Release

For Immediate Release

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HOSPITAL-ACQUIRED INFECTIONS: MORE TO DO, AUDITOR GENERAL SAYS

(TORONTO) Auditor General Jim McCarter today submitted a special report to the Speaker of the Ontario Legislature on the prevention and control of hospital-acquired infections.

“There are a number of areas where improvements are required,” McCarter said. “While the hospitals we visited and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care have implemented some good initiatives, there’s still a lot more to do.”

Hospital-acquired infections are those, such as *C. difficile*, that a patient acquires while in the hospital being treated for some other condition and that can cause illness or even death. In the last few years, one Ontario hospital reported more than 75 deaths related to *C. difficile* and others have experienced significant outbreaks. Contributing factors can range from improper antibiotic use to inadequate hand hygiene among hospital workers to improper cleaning of patient rooms.

Our Office visited three hospitals in Toronto, Ottawa and Windsor to assess whether they followed best practices for the prevention and control of hospital-acquired infections. All had made a number of changes to their operations to guard against such infections. But more needs to be done and we believe most of our observations apply to the hospital community at large.

We found that the hospitals we visited didn’t always ensure they followed the appropriate processes for sterilizing surgical instruments and ensuring rooms occupied by *C. difficile* patients were adequately cleaned. In addition, two of the hospitals generally did not track what equipment was used on which patient, making it difficult to notify patients if equipment is subsequently found to have been inadequately sterilized.

“One of the most important measures in the fight against hospital-acquired infections is prevention—not the development of new technology or super drugs. Quite simply, a key first step is that all hospital staff—from doctors to nurses to cleaning personnel – must frequently wash their hands,” McCarter added. But at 10 hospitals that participated in a provincial awareness campaign, including one that we visited, compliance with the rules of good hand hygiene ranged from just 40 per cent to 75 per cent.

This report would normally be included in the Auditor General’s *2008 Annual Report*, scheduled for release in December. However, it is being released now because of a motion by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts requesting that the Auditor General consider tabling the results of this audit immediately upon completion and because of the significant public interest in *C. difficile*.

-30-

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For more information and to read the special report, please visit www.auditor.on.ca.

Copies of the report are available by calling (416) 327-2381.