Implementing Performance Observation Audits for Environmental Cleaning in Five Steps

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Background

Performance observation audits ensure staff are following best practice. It is one of three types of audits used to measure, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of a health care setting's environmental cleaning practices. This document is part of the Environmental Cleaning Auditing series and its companion products. The steps in this document are a continuation of the Introduction to Implementing Environmental Cleaning Auditing.

Objectives

The purpose of this document is to help health care settings to develop or improve the auditing portion of their environmental services department's quality control program. It provides:

- an overview of the implementation steps of an environmental cleaning audit process to support infection prevention and control (IPAC) best practices,

- environmental cleaning best practices, and improvement initiatives;

- guidance on how to use a 5-step approach to implement environmental cleaning audits within an organization.

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Plan	Audit	Analyze and Strategize	Implement strategies	Improve and Sustain

Step 1: Plan

Please refer to Fundamentals: Introduction to Implementing Environmental Cleaning Auditing. Step 1 – Plan is discussed in detail in this document.

Step 2: Audit

To start auditing, use the Environmental Cleaning Performance Observation Audit Tool or organization specific form(s).

A consistent form is used to help ensure that audits are being performed in the same way every time. It contains step-by-step best practices for cleaning a patient or resident room.

Conducting the Audit

Performance Observation Tool assesses compliance with provincial best practices when performing the routine cleaning of a patient or resident room. Health care settings can modify this form to include elements of their organizations policies and procedures or create forms that audit other practices as required. The procedures that are audited should be determined by the type of cleaning and the issues faced by the organization.

Auditors should introduce themselves to the staff member and inform them that they will be conducting an audit before the staff member begins. Auditors use the form to ensure that the staff member is performing the work using the proper technique and in the correct order. Some items are not directly observable and the auditor will need to speak to the staff member during the observation. Where possible, use objective measures such as chemical test strips to ensure disinfectants are properly mixed.

The form allows an opportunity for on-the-spot feedback to the individuals as well as to identify future training needs. The comments section can be used to note any difficulties, describe the issues identified, or list any concerns from the auditor or staff member.

Acceptable result

These audits are not intended to be scored. The purpose is to identify training or other needs for improvement and to instill staff with the confidence that they are doing their job properly.

Frequency of Audits

Audits are labour-intensive and organizations should ensure sufficient time is dedicated to conducting performance audits. According to the Canadian Standards Association, performance observation audits shall be conducted, at a minimum, at least once a year for every health care worker involved in cleaning and disinfection.[2] Additional audits can be performed if other audits have identified an issue or during outbreaks for a pathogen that requires special environmental cleaning procedures (e.g., *Clostridioides*. *difficile/C. difficile).*

Step 3: Analyze and Strategize

The information collected during audits should be reviewed and analyzed to determine what is working well and what needs to be improved. Prioritize action items based on risk and available resources.

One-on-one feedback should be given to each staff member. This can be done at the time of the audit or following analysis of the data. Issues identified should be viewed as educational opportunities that can be addressed in that staff member's professional development plan.

Collect and analyze data

The results of audits may be analyzed in different ways, including combining results into aggregate scores. Audits of entire departments can be looked at as a whole to identify areas for improvement and any barriers that may be preventing improvement. Data can be presented in different ways, including graphs, tables, or infographics.

Identify barriers

It is important to remember that the purpose of environmental cleaning auditing is to assist staff in providing a safe environment for patients/clients/residents, and not to penalize staff. There are a

number of reasons why audit results might be lower than expected. If audit results are lower than expected, organizations should review for:

- Adequacy of staff training, including refreshers for certain practices;

- Changes to the physical environment that might be impeding the ability of staff to properly clean;

- Changes in the equipment or products staff are using to clean;

- Adequacy of environmental services staffing levels for cleaning required, including sufficient time for staff to do a thorough job; and

- Appropriateness of the frequency and timing of cleaning.

Develop an Action Plan

Health care settings should develop an action plan with strategies based on the results and identified barriers. Collaborate with staff to identify solutions that best meet their needs. Collaboration with staff includes discussing barriers and participating in shared goal setting for improvement. The next section: Step 4: Implement Strategies, identifies potential strategies to include in your action plan.

Table 1: Example of an Action Plan

Area for Improvement/Barrier	Strategy/Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Action Complete
Surfaces are not remaining wet for the 10 minutes required for the disinfectant being used	Obtain a disinfectant with a shorter contact time	Purchasing	Within 1 month	(Mark progress/completion)
New staff member is cleaning rooms in the incorrect order	New staff member will be assigned to shadow an experienced staff member	Supervisor	Within 1 day	(Mark progress/completion)

When developing an action plan, consider using specific dates, rather than general time frames, for the timeline to implement strategies.

Step 4: Implement Strategies

Strategies used to address action items identified from the audits can be implemented in different ways depending on an organization's culture and resources. Involving staff in the implementation process will help to achieve more sustainable results.

The following are examples of improvement strategies that may be implemented based on identified barriers or areas for improvement

Strategy A: Deliver training to staff

Education and training should be targeted to the audience and help achieve the goals set by the team. Consider the following strategies for delivering education and training to staff:

- Hold educational sessions to review best practices and to target the gaps identified from the audits.

- Include training during staff huddles or meetings. The Huddle Resource for Environmental Cleaning can assist with this.

- Ensure materials are appropriate to the audience (e.g., consideration for level of education, language barriers, literacy).

- Distribute educational materials.

- Ensure that training is consistently made available to staff.

- Vary the information delivery methods to cater to different learning styles and work contexts, and make the training interactive.

- Provide ways for individuals to directly observe or shadow experienced people.

- Use a train-the-trainer approach.

- Assign a mentor to new staff, or staff that need extra help.

- Have staff re-visit online learning modules that are relevant to the issues identified.

Strategy B: Reminders of key practices

Reminder systems can provide an immediate prompt to staff to follow best practices. Consider the following strategies for providing reminders to staff:

- Develop or use existing reminder systems or prompts designed to help individuals recall information and/or prompt them to follow a practice such as posters, cart resources, or lanyard cards.

- Identify a signal word that one staff could say to another to remind them of missed or incorrect practices.

Strategy C: Structure the environment

The way a workplace is organized and the work is structured can be adjusted to help facilitate improvement. Consider the following environmental factors:

- Evaluate the environment to facilitate cleaning. Some areas may be obstructed by carts, furniture, or clutter.

- Ensure that supplies are conveniently located so that environmental services staff can follow best practices.

Strategy D: Adjust resources as required

The resources required for environmental cleaning can change based on a number of factors. Consider factors that may increase the required level of resources, such as:

- changes in practice or cleaning requirements that require additional staff dedicated to environmental cleaning.

- an outbreak or change in the number of patients or residents on additional precautions that increases the amount of time it takes to properly clean.

Strategy E: Increase audit frequency

Temporarily increasing the frequency of auditing can lead to improvement. One of the benefits of an increased auditing frequency is giving staff an opportunity to demonstrate their improvement.

Step 5: Improve and Sustain

Once an auditing system is established, it is important to continue conducting audits on a regular basis in order to identify any new gaps and to ensure previous gaps are not reoccurring. Integrating environmental cleaning audits into the IPAC program will help lead to sustained improvement. The following are some strategies to support the sustainability of improvements.

Engage staff in a Start-Stop-Continue Exercise

Communicate and involve staff as much as possible in the process. Ensure that the language used and atmosphere are non-punitive and non-judgemental. When making decisions about what to do next, consider a "Start-Stop-Continue" exercise with the team.

- Start: What should the team start doing?

- Stop: What should the team stop doing?

- Continue: What should the team keep doing?

Celebrate and recognize success and improvements!

Be sure to recognize success and staff contributions. Talk with the team and revisit the action plan to understand what helped contribute to these successes, and to identify possible barriers to improvements that could be planned for differently next time.

Regularly reassess the Program

The auditing program should be reassessed periodically. Determine if the auditing form meets the health care setting's needs. Make changes to existing forms to align them with organizational policy and create new forms as required. Consider if the health care setting needs to create a new observational assessment form to assess a different procedure. Determine if the health care setting is ready to expand its auditing program to include additional audits.

References

1. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee. Best practices for environmental cleaning for prevention and control of infections in all health care settings. 3rd ed. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2018. Available from: www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/B/2018/bp-environmental-cleaning.pdf

2. CSA Group. CSA Z317.12:20 Cleaning and disinfection of health care facilities. Toronto, ON: CSA Group; 2020.

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