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Hospital bugs cost EU €5.5bn per year

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Healthcare associated infections (HCAs) contribute to the deaths of 110,000 and cost an estimated €5.5bn every year, but could be dramatically reduced if best practice was shared across the EU, it has been claimed.

A UK-based doctor told EurActiv that his hospital managed to slash MRSA infections by 80% in one year by using a combination of high-tech medical science and simple hygiene measures.

MEPs are calling for this kind of best practice to be shared across the EU and for targets for reducing infections to be set.

Dr Achyut Guleri, a consultant clinical microbiologist at the Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre NHS Hospitals Foundation Trust, used polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technology to find out quickly whether patients had MRSA or not, and planned their treatment accordingly.

The hospital also changed the opening hours of its laboratory and enforced tough hand-washing standards for staff and visitors. PCR can be expensive, said Dr Guleri, but the investment pays off quickly.

"If you think about it in isolation, it seems like a lot of money – around £10 to £15 per test – but the savings are much greater. When you estimate the cost of one MRSA infection, it could be anything from £2,000 to £20,000," he said.

The doctor won an [NHS Technology Innovation Award](#) in recognition of his hospital's efforts in implementing the technology.

The experience of Dr Guleri's team could serve as an example to other member states, according to an MEP who wants binding targets for cutting HCAs.

Liz Lynne (ALDE, UK) told a meeting in the European Parliament last week (March 17), organised by [Health First Europe](#), that her amendment on sharing best practice on hospital infections had been incorporated into the Cross-border Healthcare Directive by the European Parliament's employment committee.

She has also tabled amendments to a draft report on patient safety, currently going through the Parliament's environment committee, which calls on the Council of Ministers to adopt a binding target of a 40% reduction in Healthcare Acquired Infections by 2015.

According to the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#), HCAs are directly responsible for approximately 37,000 deaths annually and contribute to a further 110,000 across the EU. This results in an additional 16 million days of hospital stays per year.

Italian MEP Amalia Sartori (EPP-ED), who is the Parliament's rapporteur on the patient safety proposal, said the EU should play a central role in setting targets to encourage member states to tackle the problem.

"Infection control methods are well practiced and quick to implement. However, every year eight to 12% of patients suffer adverse effects resulting from hospital treatment. It is essential that member states provide the means necessary to reduce the numbers affected," she said.

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