

Having your say

Welcome to the second public involvement update from the Health Protection Agency. Last year we carried out a survey to find out what people think about public health hazards like infectious diseases, chemicals and poisons. This summer some of the people who participated in the survey volunteered to take part in discussion groups to talk about the issues that concerned people most, specifically health care associated infections such as MRSA.

We ran six discussion groups at venues in London, Exeter, Birmingham and Leeds. We asked people for their impressions and views about the information and advice we provide for hospital infections. To make our information even better we asked people to help us produce a new set of printed materials. We also took the opportunity to ask people what is the best way to give you a say in the work of the Health Protection Agency.

Hospital infection information



The groups were shown designs for a poster, leaflet and information-card. They were asked which bits they thought were most useful and easiest to understand. The poster and card provided five tips to 'protect you from hospital infections' while

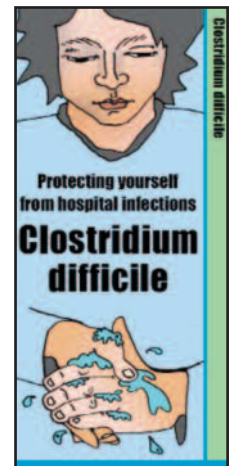
the leaflet was about a specific infection called Clostridium difficile (C diff).

They told us:

- Have a photograph of hand washing as it is the most important piece of advice.
- Keep the poster design simple with dark text on a white background as this makes it easier to read, especially for people who are visually impaired.
- The card is handy for patients to keep by their hospital bed to remind visitors and health staff about ways to prevent infection.



- Make the card into a tear-off section in a general leaflet on infections.
- Don't just send the printed materials to the usual health care places. Make sure they go to libraries, care homes and even bingo halls.
- Put this information in a hospital admission pack for new patients.
- All health and care home staff should receive this information when they start training.
- Create a family of leaflets about protecting yourself from 'superbugs' at home as well as in hospital.



Getting involved with the HPA

We wanted to develop a way for people to have a say in the running of the Agency. Not everyone wants to take an active role and attend meetings but some of you do. So we proposed three levels of involvement.

Level 1: You receive updates, newsletters, occasional surveys and invitations to events.

Level 2: You receive all of level 1 plus invitations to one-off discussion groups.

Level 3: You receive all of level 2 plus the offer to join a reference group which meets at least four times a year.

The discussion groups liked the levels of involvement but said to make the commitment to join a reference group they would need to know more.

They told us:

- Write a job description so we know what is expected of us.
- Produce terms of reference for the groups.
- Limit the time someone can sit on a group to no more than five years and no less than three.
- Offer us training so we can make a meaningful contribution.
- Ensure that the membership reflects a cross section of society.
- Allow us to ask the Agency difficult questions.

We asked the groups:

What type of work should the reference groups get involved with?

- Drafting protocols and policies e.g. when to tell the public about an outbreak.
- Leadership in ethical debates e.g. what to do in the event of an influenza pandemic.
- Input to the 'big picture' e.g. the Agency's priorities for the coming years.

How would you know if the Agency is getting public involvement right?

- Produce an annual review of involvement activities, but keep it short.
- Tell us how the Agency consults with the public when it is planning new services.
- Promote involvement through roadshows and regional events.

What happens next?

Feedback from the discussion groups will be used to improve the poster, card and leaflet. They will then be printed and tested with patients in the East of England this autumn.

Our Board will be asked to agree the three levels of involvement. Once approved expect to receive a request from us asking what level you would like to take part in the work of the Agency.

If you would like to comment on our hospital infection materials or public involvement plans please contact karen.carr@hpa.org.uk or write to us at:

Health Protection Agency, Eastbrook,
Shaftsbury Road, Cambridge, CB2
8DF; tel 01223 372843.

Website: www.hpa.org.uk