Patient program kicks off during Hand Hygiene Awareness Week

By Ben Avey, USNH Yokosuka Public Affairs

Did you wash your hands? A simple question at the heart of a new program kicking off at U.S. Naval Hospital (USNH) Yokosuka during Hand Hygiene Awareness Week observed Dec. 5-11.

The program, titled "It's OK to Ask," empowers patients to interact with medical caregivers regarding basic hand hygiene safety to help prevent the spread of illness, disease and infection in the hospital.

Per hospital regulations, at a minimum, caregivers are required to sanitize their hands by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer gel such as Purell in view of the patient before and after care. A myriad of factors determine whether soap or gel is used and that too is open to question under the new program.

While hand hygiene is a standard precaution in all medical settings, it is important to implement programs that continually reinforce the practice said Lt. Cmdr. Michael Termini, USNH Yokosuka Preventive Medicine Department head and Infection Control Committee member.

"Patients are often their own best advocates in health care and we want to empower that advocacy, let them know that we are all on the same page working to provide the safest and highest quality healthcare possible," said Termini. "We can't shy away on this; we all need to be involved."

"It's OK to Ask" will add to other quality management programs already in place which includes spot checks and performance improvement reviews to ensure continued education and compliance with current hospital hand hygiene policy.

"I have faith in the staff here but it never hurts to 'up the ante' by asking and empowering patients to get involved" said USNH Yokosuka Patient Safety Manager Edwin Hanson. "When it comes to patient safety, patients and staff alike can never be too vigilant."

Hand Hygiene Awareness Week will also include a robust schedule of continuing education programs regarding the latest research on hand hygiene, infection control protocol and notification of updates to local policies for hospital staff members.

"We have to remain diligent and engaged at all times to prevent the spread of infection and disease, even when it comes to the most mundane and common preventative measures like hand hygiene," said Termini. "That is how you keep patients safe."

"It's OK to Ask" materials including educational brochures and promotional materials will remain in use through 2011. While the current focus is on hand hygiene, other safety and patient empowerment themes will be woven into the program in coming months.

The program is based upon a patient safety initiative titled "Speak Up" created by The Joint Commission, which is the independent, not for profit body who accredits and certifies more than 18,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States and military treatment facilities worldwide.

Hand washing with soap or alcohol-based hand sanitizing gels are at the heart of Hand Hygiene Awareness Week, which is being observed Dec. 5-11 at USNH Yokosuka. A program titled "It's OK to Ask" will be will be launched at that time to empower patients to interact with medical caregivers regarding basic hand hygiene safety to help prevent the spread of illness, disease and infection in the hospital.

Healthy choices can help you avoid holiday season weight gain

By MCSN Alexandra Snow, National Naval Medical Center Public Affairs

The holiday season began Nov. 25 with Thanksgiving for most people, and the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) is reminding everyone this does not have to be a time of year for gaining weight.

People tend to look at the holiday season as a continuous celebration and often relax their eating habits, said Lauren Thomas, NNMC registered dietician. That can cause someone to gain three or four pounds during the season — a setback for those watching their weight.

"I tell people to enjoy Thanksgiving and then the next day, get back to healthy eating and healthy portions," said Thomas. "Don't extend holiday eating from Thanksgiving until New Year's. Isolate one or two days where you can really splurge on holiday food and maintain healthy eating habits the other days of the season."

To avoid holiday weight gain, Thomas recommends making healthy choices. Eat white turkey meat, which is lower in fat and calories. Yams and plain sweet potatoes are also healthier options, as is cranberry sauce, though the amount of sugar can be excessive.

Thomas also suggests watching the amount of alcohol you consume — especially holiday drinks such as egg nog, which has nearly 300 calories for every four ounces.

"At parties, try loading your plate with healthy options such as shrimp, veggies and then a small portion of dessert," Thomas said.

Have a small piece of pie, keeping in mind the crust is the most fattening part, said Thomas.

Dr. Larry Grubb, NNMC Behavioral Health department outpatient psychiatrist, said it's important not to restrict how much you eat all day in order to eat more at a holiday party.

"You will be so hungry when you get to the party, you will eat far more food than you intended," said Grubb. "Have a snack before the big dinner. Eat a little bit of everything at the party, but don't eat too much."

He said that drinking plenty of water throughout the day is another way to keep you from over-eating.

"At holiday parties, bring a healthy dish, such as a vegetable platter, fruit bowl or sparkling wine or apple cider … something you know you can have that is healthy," Thomas said.

Grubb said holiday weight gain can also be avoided by staying active.

"One of the major causes of weight gain during the holidays is lack of physical activity," he said. "You may be running around doing holiday errands and forget to take time to exercise. After you eat a big meal, don't lay down for a nap, but instead, go for a walk."

When out shopping and running errands, park the car farther away from the store for the extra steps, and walk a few extra laps around the mall, he said.

"If you're serious about watching your weight during the holidays, also watch the scale," she said. "If you notice you are gaining, it might be an incentive to re-examine your eating habits."

Try to keep up your exercise program and increasing your exercise to compensate for the extra calories consumed, said Thomas.

"Stick to these simple tips and you won't gain any extra weight," said Grubb. "In fact, if you eat wisely and add a little more activity into your daily routine you might do the impossible — lose weight over the holidays."

Experts discuss revisions to nutrition portion of PRT program

By MC1(AW) LaTunya Howard, NPC Public Affairs

Navy nutrition experts gathered at the 2010 Dietitians in Uniform Services Symposium held in Natick, Mass., Nov. 5-6, to discuss revisions to the current nutrition portion of the physical readiness program.

"There are two key components of the Navy's Physical Readiness Program: fitness and nutrition," said Lt. Cmdr. Jennifer Wallinger, Physical Readiness Program nutrition officer. "The Navy has embraced the 'culture of physical fitness' with the support of leadership, policy changes and increased availability of fitness resources, including Morale Welfare and Recreation specialists and dedicated command fitness leaders. Now it is time to focus on nutrition."

Sailors assigned to the aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) run the mile and a half portion of the Navy Physical Readiness Test (PRT) on board CFAY Nov. 12. The PRT is performed every six months to evaluate the ability of Sailors to perform at a required standard.

U.S. Navy photo by MC3 David A. Cox

The Physical Readiness Program (OPNAV N135) hosted a Navy Nutrition Planning Meeting Sept.14-16. Attendees included registered dietitians and nutrition experts from the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Naval Supply Systems Command (responsible for shipboard nutrition) and the Navy Marine Corps Public Health Center.

The purpose was to bring subject-matter-experts together to discuss and develop a strategic plan for addressing the current nutritional issues faced by Sailors, Department of Defense (DoD) employees and their families.

"Nutrition is a vital element of personal and physical readiness," said Wallinger. "We need to increase efforts to work collaboratively with policy makers, food service personnel, educators and health care providers to make necessary changes to improve the health and readiness of the total force."

The combined efforts from the planning meeting generated Navy input for the 2010 Dietitians in Uniformed Services Symposium, where the current DoD-wide practices were reviewed.

"Our goal is to provide a comprehensive review of how we do business and deploy best practices to create an environment for success," said Wallinger. "Nutrition is important to the Navy, and we must do our part to make the nutritious choice the easy choice."