HHS launches action plan to prevent HAIs

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has launched an action plan with 5-year targets for preventing health care-associated infections (HAIs). The plan was developed by an HHS steering committee involving a number of federal agencies.

“This plan will serve as our roadmap on how the department addresses this important public health and patient safety issue,” then-HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt said in January.

The first 4 types of infection to be targeted are surgical site infections (SSI), central line-associated bloodstream infections, ventilator-related pneumonia, and catheter-associated urinary tract infections. These account for about 3 in 4 HAIs in acute care hospitals.

So far, the steering committee and its working groups have:
• identified 7 metrics with national 5-year prevention targets
• identified gaps in current knowledge and created a research agenda
• recommended standardization of data elements and adoption and use of data standards for infection tracking
• documented federal agency initiatives and strategies for preventing and combating infections
• developed a campaign to publicize the plan.

Proposed SSI metrics
For SSI, there are 2 proposed 5-year prevention targets and metrics:
• SSI 1. Metric: Deep incision and organ space infection rates using National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN) definitions. Target: Median deep incision and organ space infection rate for each procedure/risk group at or below current NHSN 25th percentile.
• SSI 2: Metric: Adherence to Surgical Care Improvement Project (SCIP)/National Quality Forum measures for perioperative antibiotics, hair removal, postoperative glucose control, and normothermia. Target: 95% adherence with each measure.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates about 1.7 million HAIs occurred in US hospitals in 2002, with 99,000 deaths.

The CDC estimates infections add as much as $20 billion a year to the nation’s health bill.

HHS plans to hold meetings in the spring to gather public comment on the plan and share opportunities for organizations to participate. The meeting dates will be posted on the HHS website at www.hhs.gov/ophs.

Comments on the HHS plan are accepted through Feb 6.