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# Improving infection control in health facilities

FATMA Ahmed was surprised to discover that she was suffering, not only from kidney failure, but also from hepatitis C virus (HCV) which she contracted during the kidney dialysis sessions she was given at the hospital where she was being treated.

Dr Nasr, 39, a practitioner working in one of health units in Sohag Governorate, Upper Egypt, was afflicted with HCV as a result of attending one of the patients who frequented the unit. Dr Nasr does not want to talk about his illness until he completes his course of treatment. He said that infection control in most hospitals was almost non-existent, especially when it came to the smaller hospital and rural health units. He thinks a medical revolution is needed to ensure that measures

for infection control are implemented.

"Medical staff in the rural health units also succumb to infection. Infections do not discriminate between patients and doctors," Dr Nasr said that after finishing his course of treatment, he would launch a campaign to establish measures for the prevention and control of infection, so as to protect his colleagues.

M. N., a nurse who works in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) affiliated to the Fever Hospital in Abbassia, was no better off. She was nursing a patient suffering from malaria. While administering an injection, she accidentally pricked her finger and became infected. However, quick medical handling of the situation prevented her condition from deteriorating and she recovered.

Infection affects doctors and patients alike. Bacterial diseases that spread inside the hospitals are the most serious hazard facing the health sector in Egypt and the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) pointed out that every year, 13 per cent of patients receiving treatment in hospitals all over the world contract bacterial infections. However, in Egypt, the average for contracting bacterial infections during treatment sessions in the Intensive Care Units (ICUs), is 15 per cent. The longer the treatment, the higher the average.

Unofficial statistics have shown that nearly 30 per cent of the medical staff of hospitals have become ill during the course of their work. According to the statistics, 15,000 physicians and more than 300 nurses are suffering from

HCV. The government gives just LE30 as extra allowance to doctors who treat patients suffering from bacterial and viral diseases and chronic illness such as hepatitis and AIDS.

The National Infection Control Programme (NICP) has pointed out that 19.3 per cent of health facilities are committed to applying the infection control recommendations. It said that there was no actual application of the infection control programme in the hospitals. Infection control committees had been set up in 35 per cent of the hospitals, but they were inactive. There were not enough people specialised in infection control and there was a lack of technical expertise. In addition, there was no supervision and checking of proper instrument cleaning and sterili-

sation, to prevent infection. The Ministry of Health has stated that strategies have been drawn up to achieve the NICP targets, namely, establishing an organisational structure for planning and following up infection control, setting up a surveillance system to monitor infection transmission in hospitals and the vaccination of medical teams (doctors, nurses, technicians and workers).

According to the national programme, specialised and dedicated infection control teams have already been trained. There are 1,346 doctors and 2,4702 nurses working in state-run hospitals nationwide who have received training in infection control; and 346 physicians working in the kidney dialysis units have also been

trained. Up to 60 per cent of the medical staff in all the healthcare units and 75 per cent in state-run hospitals have been vaccinated against hepatitis B virus. In the meantime, kidney dialysis patients in all the hospitals including those of the Ministry of Health, have received free vaccinations.