

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF HAND HYGIENE PRACTICES OF BELIZEAN HEALTHCARE WORKERS

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**Background:** Proper hand hygiene, which includes handwashing with soap and water and sanitizing with alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR), continues to be one of the most effective ways to prevent infections in healthcare facilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare workers (HCWs) in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) are at a heightened risk of infection due to limited supplies and constrained infrastructure.

**Materials/Methods:** A qualitative assessment was conducted to explore methods, perceptions, and barriers to hand hygiene practices from the perspective of HCWs in Belize to address needs and provide recommendations. Focus group discussions were conducted with the administrative and clinical staff at 11 public hospitals and clinics in all six administrative districts of Belize. The discussions were recorded, transcribed, coded using MaxQDA, and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach.

**Results:** HCWs felt motivated to practice hand hygiene by a desire to protect family and patients from disease and by the sense of comfort it offers, as well as by external cues such as posters, presence of ABHR, and media coverage of COVID-19. When identifying priority situations for practicing hand hygiene, HCWs emphasized using hand hygiene between patient contacts, especially in invasive procedures. A common barrier to proper hand hygiene was a lack of ABHR or hand drying materials. Due to these shortages and high patient volume during the pandemic, many HCWs preferred using personal ABHR bottles to sanitize their hands. Additionally, HCWs expressed concerns about facility ABHR and soap drying their skin; many HCWs brought personal hand hygiene products or moisturizers to reduce these effects. Focus group participants identified the need for regular hand hygiene education, higher quality products, and increased hand hygiene supplies for patients to address these concerns.

**Conclusions:** This study found that HCWs were motivated to perform hand hygiene but expressed concerns about product availability and quality. These perspectives will inform recommendations to help support hand hygiene efforts in Belize during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Author recommendations include improving ABHR supply chain and management at each facility and launching an educational campaign to improve hand hygiene knowledge and practices.

**Images / Graph / Table:** No image uploaded