

PRESS RELEASE: Launch of the HFE report on ‘Identifying the gaps between evidence and practice in the prevention of surgical site infections’

Brussels, Tuesday 17 November 2020 – Health First Europe today launches a new Insight Report titled *“Identifying the gaps between evidence and practice in the prevention of surgical site infections”* showing a striking gaps between evidence-based measures suggested by official guidelines and medical practices in European hospitals which represent a serious concern for the safety of European patients.

Surgical Site Infections (SSIs) are infections that occur within 30 days following a surgical procedure and affect either the incision or deep tissue at the site of the operation. SSIs pose a threat to the lives of millions of patients each year, leading to over 16,000 deaths. Increased patient morbidity, mortality, and loss of earnings during recovery are some of the indirect costs associated with SSIs. The overall cost of SSIs in Europe is estimated to be around €19billion.

Moreover, the issues of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and SSI are part of the same vicious circle. As any healthcare-associated infection, SSIs are often caused by antibiotic resistant organisms. SSI treatment has become very complex and challenging due to antibiotic resistance (AMR), the pathogens’ adaptive ability to defend themselves against drugs intended to kill them.

These factors give rise to more emphasis on the **prevention of SSIs in patients across Europe**. Such prevention should **aim at protecting and promoting patient safety while decreasing the rate and burden of infections, especially in relation to AMR bacteria**.

The good news is that SSIs are largely avoidable and up to 50% can generally be prevented through the successful implementation of clinical practice guidelines. If the necessary actions are taken, the threat of drug-resistant infections will be minimised, resulting in millions of lives saved.

To prevent and manage infections across the surgical pathway, it is necessary to implement a holistic and multilevel strategy. This should include system change, improving guidelines adherence, training, education, monitoring, surveillance, evaluation, and communications for awareness raising.

The Report draws the attention of European Policymakers to 5 key policy calls that would reduce the incidence of SSIs in Europe:

- Creating a European Framework on HAI prevention and control that would allow reaching a consensus around evidence-based guidelines and clearly defined protocols to prevent SSIs

- Harmonising evidence-based guidelines in line with the [WHO official guidelines](#) by facilitating the creation of an Expert Forum to adopt evidence-based guidelines such as those issued by the WHO and support their implementation across Europe. It is also important to foster the involvement of scientific associations' in inter-sectoral training on HAI prevention and control.
- Expanding ECDC's role to ensure observation, surveillance and data gathering and communicate current and emerging threats to human health posed by infectious diseases. Surveillance data on infections are a key element of any prevention programme, as is having standardised reporting and data comparability across the European Union
- Facilitating guidelines implementation and adherence through the creation of instructions and standardised safety checklists that increase surgical procedure safety and promote better communication and collaboration among surgical teams
- Developing a European curriculum for infection prevention by supporting Member States in developing harmonised education and training standards relating to infection prevention and control based on the WHO surgical checklist and guidelines as part of their national healthcare professional curricula.

Last but not least, Health First Europe believes that it is necessary to facilitate the exchange and scaling up of best practices at any level and put in place rewarding systems to promote excellence in quality of care and patient safety.

Our Insight Report collates the results of a pan-European survey commented by national experts to raise national and European policy makers' attention on the need to harmonise guidelines and protocols to prevent Surgical Site Infections. Only reducing the gaps between evidence and medical practices we can save lives.

Roberto Bertolini – Health First Europe President

About Health First Europe

Health First Europe is a non-profit, non-commercial alliance of patients, healthcare workers, academics, healthcare experts and the medical technology industry. We are joining forces to transform health care through innovative solutions. Since we believe that every European citizen should benefit from the best medical treatments available, we aim to ensure that equitable access to modern, innovative and reliable health care solutions is seen as a vital investment in the future of Europe. Our alliance was born in 2004 thanks to commitment of our co-Patrons and our members to build truly patient-centred healthcare systems in Europe.