

Bringing the Importance of Surveillance to the Attention of the ODA

In developing its policies on Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) the Ontario Ministry of Health does acknowledge the significance of Surveillance. In this regard Surveillance is the study of health care acquired infections or nosocomial infections. It is appreciated that without fully understanding how, when, where when and why a nosocomial infection occurs, developing effective IPAC programs against the infection is not possible.

It is worthwhile noting that the RCDSO does not refer to Surveillance in its draft of new Standards for IPAC.

The Ministry of Health recognizes two forms of Surveillance.

One is Process Surveillance. Essentially this is a form of practice audit. It usually consists of a series of recommendations against which the practice will be assessed. The Ministry has clearly indicated that before these recommendations can be used to assess a practice they must have been shown to be effective in reducing nosocomial infections from that practice or similar type practices. Since there are no studies on the nosocomial infections of dental origin, it is not possible to know how effective these recommendations are. Therefore, performing health unit investigations of a dental practice is an exercise in futility as it is not known if the recommendations proposed by the Ministry of Health or the RCDSO are effective in reducing dentally related infections.

The other is Outcome Surveillance. This is when the rate of occurrence of a specific infection within a specific group of patients in a particular health care facility is compared with predetermined standards. The Ministry of Health acknowledges that there are no such standards for conducting this form of surveillance on ambulatory care patients which would include those in general dental practices. This means that attempting to assess the significance of cases of HCV infection in a dental practice cannot be assessed against any meaningful data. It is another exercise in futility.

It is important to appreciate that Process Surveillance and to a lesser degree Outcome Surveillance are critical aspects of Health Unit investigations of dental practices.

Confirmation of the above can be found in the Ministry of Health document,

“Best Practices for Infection Prevention and Control Programs in Ontario.”