

VITAL SIGNS

Prevention: Cameras Can Help Ensure Hand Washing

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There is a simple and effective way of getting hospital workers to wash their hands consistently: Watch them wash, and then congratulate them for having done so.

Employees at a Long Island hospital installed cameras with views of every hand-washing sink and hand sanitizer in an intensive care unit. For 16 weeks, without collecting identifying personal information, they monitored workers as they entered and left patient rooms. The results were reported last month in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*.

All the workers knew about the cameras, but the results were not encouraging. Just [6.5 percent of workers on average washed their hands within 10 seconds of entering or leaving a room](#).

But then the researchers installed light-emitting diode boards in the hallway of the I.C.U. announcing the compliance rates, with a little added cheerleading: “Great Shift!!” when things were going well, or “Keep It Up” when some improvement was needed.

During the 16 weeks after the installation of the signs, compliance rates jumped to 81.6 percent, and for the next 18 months the average rate was 87.9 percent.

“People’s behavior does change when they’re being watched,” said the lead author, Dr. Bruce F. Farber, chief of infectious disease at North Shore University Hospital. “This changed the culture. It’s now three years later, and people are washing their hands at dramatically higher rates.”