



Helping people with pets suffering from MRSA

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MRSA in Front-Line Veterinary Practice

Over the last three years or so Meticillin resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) has achieved increasing prominence as a an emerging problem for veterinary practices, and The Bella Moss Foundation has taken the lead in bringing relevant, up-to-date knowledge and validated information to front-line vets.

Practical approaches to prevention of MRSA infections are really no different from those in use in human hospitals. MRSA is capable of existing on dry uncleaned surfaces for extended periods of time by surviving on the skin cells that are shed by the people in the environment. Therefore, keeping the clinical environment and equipment clean of dust and debris (and including use of an effective disinfectant) is the first step in prevention.

Hand-touch areas such as door handles, telephones, stethoscopes, thermometers etc. are a significant source of contamination and should be cleaned and disinfected regularly. Clinical items should be specialised for individual patients.

MRSA tends to be spread easily by direct contact, therefore good personal hygiene and particularly hand washing and sanitisation are vital. There are many good guides to effective hand washing, but the rule of thumb is that the hands should be washed every time they collect dirt or debris, and only sanitised if they have simply come into contact with hand-touch areas.

Skin cells constantly shed from the human body, so long sleeves and trousers should be worn at work to reduce the accumulation of dust. Hair should always be tied back and jewellery be kept to an absolute minimum.

A clinical procedure that breaks the skin or introduces implants or indwelling items to the body significantly increases the risk of infection so good aseptic or sterile technique is vital. The wearing of gloves for all contact with animals should be made routine as should the wearing of masks gowns and gloves for all clinical procedures.

Assessing risk is also important. The major risk factors associated with infections of all types include: A patient with an impaired immune system or chronic illness treated with steroids, non-healing wounds, long hospital stays, repeated use of broad-spectrum antibiotics long surgical procedures, and an owner working in a human health setting particularly care homes and clinical areas. There are other risks factors including the possibility that veterinary staff may have a higher occupational risk of carrying MRSA and audit of infections should be made regularly but these are the main ones, and should be assessed when considering risk of infection.

It appears clear from the current research that humans represent the greatest risk of MRSA to animals because the identified rout of transmission in all but a small number of cases has been from human to animal. Assessing the biophysical vulnerability of each animal will help prevent poor practice as well as identify those animals particularly at risk.

MRSA can be treated successfully if it is identified early and treated correctly and most fatalities so far have occurred because of a failure to achieve those two conditions. Proper clinical practice, accurate risk assessment, early detection and treatment with the appropriate antibiotics are the surest way of ensuring that we do not replicate in veterinary practices the present level of infections found in human hospitals.

www.veterinarynursetrainingonline.org for more information oninfection control

www.thebellamossfoundation.com Charity website

www.pets-mrsa.com blog