Improving Health Care Worker Safety in Two Countries: Conclusions from the Japan-America Collaborative Program

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The Japan-America Collaborative Program on Occupational Infection Control and Prevention has provided an unprecedented opportunity. Our two countries have conducted parallel surveillance for 5 years enabling the comparison of occupational infection risk and the impact of different devices, practices, policies and health care systems. The data show that differences in waste disposal systems has a noticeable effect on how and where injuries occur leading to recommendations on improvements in disposal container availability and optimal placement. Safety-engineered devices have demonstrated efficacy in reducing the rates of needlesticks in the U.S. The law requiring use of such devices in the U.S. has lead to declines in injury rates demonstrated in EPINet data. Some of Japan’s special contributions to international progress include: 1) Japanese data on infection rates following hepatitis C exposure, and 2) the unique achievement of widespread adoption of blunt-tipped suture needles in the operating room. These contributions lead the way for other countries, including the U.S. to follow Japan’s example. Continuing clinical evaluations of new and safer technology and sharing of evaluation data will help both countries to progress in adopting the safest technology for protecting health care workers.