



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Deadly Ties: IDC Proposes Hospital Ban on Infection Causing Neck Wear; Other Bacteria Carrying Clothing

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The Independent Democratic Conference today urged a prohibition on doctors and other healthcare professionals wearing neck ties, jewelry and other items that studies indicate are carriers for potentially deadly hospital-borne infections.

This effort will help save lives, cut down on the number of lawsuits filed against doctors and hospitals, lower insurance costs for care, and – ultimately – lower medical malpractice insurance costs.

“What your doctor wears around his or her neck can literally make you sick,” said Senator Jeffrey D. Klein, (D-Bronx/ Westchester). “By making commonsense changes to the way that our health professionals dress in a clinical setting, we can prevent suffering, lower costs, and most importantly save lives.”

Healthcare facilities across the country are grappling with serious infections, such as *methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), which are spread through hospital stays and are resistant to sterilization techniques. Nationally, the number of reported MRSA infections skyrocketed from 2,000 in 1993 to 368,000 in 2005, (the most recent available numbers), according to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The number of MRSA-related deaths in 2005 surpasses the number of suspected deaths from HIV/AIDS that year.

Further research has shown that neck ties worn by doctors and other medical personnel are likely carriers of infection-causing bacteria. Specifically, a 2004 study at Queens Hospital found that 47 percent of the ties worn by medical staff at the hospital harbored illness causing bacteria. The study also noted that ties worn by doctors and other clinical staff were eight times more infectious than security guards ties.

The IDC has introduced legislation that will help establish a hygienic dress code for medical professionals. Under the legislation, a 25-member advisory council made up of experts appointed by the Commissioner of Health will be charged with developing the codes. Areas of examination would include:

- Barring the wearing of neck ties for doctors and hospital workers in a clinical setting;
- Adopting a “bare below the elbow” policy: wearing short-sleeve shirts, cleaning identification badges, avoiding wearing wrist watches and jewelry, and abandoning long white coats;
- Providing education to patients and practitioners about how the new hygienic policy helps reduce cross-infection;
- Requiring hospitals to provide an adequate supply of scrubs to medical staff to ensure frequent change;
- Ban the wearing of uniforms outside of the hospital, or other health care setting.

“This legislation will bring experts to the table to address a serious but preventable problem,” said Senator David J. Valesky, (D-Oneida). “By considering ways to decrease infection and educating health practitioners, we can save lives and ultimately decrease health care costs.

Similar dress codes were implemented in other parts of the country with much success. For instance, a health center in St. Louis saw a 50 percent drop in reduction in infections when a hygienic dress code was provided. Also, a hospital in Indiana - which adopted a hygienic dress code upon opening two years ago - has no reported instances of hospital-acquired infections.

“This is the ounce of prevention that is needed to stop these dangerous infections and their potentially deadly consequences,” said Senator David Carlucci, (D-Rockland/ Orange).

This proposal comes at a time when cost-saving measures, particularly those that help to ensure the health of the people of New York, should be welcomed. The costs to all parties involved are minimal, especially compared to the cost of treatment of those patients infected by MRSA and other Multi-Drug Resistant Organisms.

Patients who contract MRSA have average hospital stays that are nearly twice as long and cost almost twice as much, when compared to non-infected counterparts.

New York currently has the highest medical malpractice insurance costs in the nation. Between 1999 and 2004, the cumulative premium increase was 147 percent, a yearly average yearly increase of 27 percent. Those costs, which continue to rise, is the result of jury awards being paid out to preventable medical mistakes, a category that includes hospital-borne infections.

“This is a very simple equation,” said Senator Diane Savino, (D-Staten Island/ Brooklyn). “Adopting a hygienic dress code for medical professionals means less infections, less lawsuits, lower medical malpractice premiums and more lives saved.”