

A misleading estimate on SSIs

To the Editor:

A Public Health Report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, March/April 2007, Vol. 122) addressed the "Estimated Health Care Associated Infections and Deaths in U.S. Hospitals in 2002—including surgical site infections (SSIs).

Whereas the text states that there are “about two (2) surgical site infections per 100 procedures,” the reader is referred to a Figure on the page that indicates that “20% of the hospital acquired infections (HAIs) were SSIs.”

Inquiring of the agency's director, Julie Gerberding, MD, as to the accuracy of that statement, she clarified it as follows (personal communication, February 27, 2008):

“The text and figure describe both the number of surgical site infections (representing a rate of about 2 SSIs per 100 procedures) and the frequency of their proportion to be 20% of the total number estimated health-care associated infections. Therefore, the 20% was not estimating any SSI rate, but merely describing the proportion of all infections hospital wide that occur at the surgical site.”

It is important that your readers be advised of this clarification.

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