Infection control has been a focus of healthcare around the country for many years, and it is an integral part of our patients’ road to recovery while in the hospital. Athens-Limestone Hospital has diligently worked for years to help train and educate our staff with the latest information available on combating infection.

Like building a pyramid, the success of our program has depended upon the support from all departments and having them embrace the initiatives and take ownership at all levels. It takes a team approach and according to Dr Don Stalons, chief of Diagnostic, Information and Epidemiology Services at Athens-Limestone Hospital, “It’s everyone’s responsibility.”

Dr. Stalons said that these building blocks include effective antibiotic utilization, developing meaningful diagnostic procedures and making sure that we identify those patients coming into the hospital that may have unapparent infections.

This team approach starts with a clean environment. Our environmental services staff works hard to keep up with the demands of keeping our hospital clean. “The disinfecting practices we have in place are very thorough and carried out with sincerity by all staff members,” according to Mark Dunham, Director of Environmental Services at Athens-Limestone Hospital.

The hospital recently began using a monitoring device that detects ATP, Adenosine Triphosphate, a biochemical found in all living organisms and biological residues. This device gives immediate feedback on the effectiveness of our cleaning procedures, and it is also used for training and education.

Hand hygiene is an important part of Infection Control in any healthcare setting. We take proper hand hygiene very seriously here at Athens-Limestone Hospital, Stalons said. It is an emphasis in education and training of all employees and is monitored throughout each day.

“Hand hygiene is the single most important way that our staff can prevent the spread of infection,” according to Michael Estremera, Infection Preventionist at Athens-Limestone Hospital. Hand sanitizer is found throughout our hospital for staff, visitors and patients to use. With all the technology available to use, simply washing your hands and keeping things clean can be paramount in stopping the spread of disease.

While cleanliness and hand hygiene are the basis of infection control, there are many other important aspects. One of these involves the proper use of antibiotics. According to Dr. Stalons, getting the right antibiotic at the right time gives our patients a greater chance for therapeutic success during their illness.

Infection control works closely with the pharmacy and laboratory to give our doctors a complete diagnostic picture of their patient’s condition. This work begins as soon as a patient enters the hospital. We have many diagnostic tools in place to establish the present on admission status of our patients and help get them on the road to recovery.

Hospital-Acquired Infections (HAIs) are a big concern for any healthcare setting. No one comes into the hospital to get sick. Athens-Limestone Hospital has very low infection rates due to the diligent work of our hospital staff.

We monitor for HAIs continually using a data mining system that was developed in the state of Alabama. If an HAI is found, it is thoroughly investigated. We are always looking for ways to improve our processes. We want to ensure that our patients, visitors and staff are safe while in our facility.