

# Beyond Directives: Effective Visual Cues Support Open Communication and Participatory Care to Improve Hand Hygiene Compliance in the Wards

## Introduction

Hand hygiene (HH) plays a critical role in safe patient care. Traditionally, directives from the authorities have been the main driving force of compliance. While this is a definite pathway to implement a system of safe care, there is a paradigm shift toward open communication, and a focus on implementing initiatives creatively to improve infection control outcomes.

## The Challenge

Studies have shown that the human attention span is a little less than nine seconds. Although this is a contentious subject, it does highlight the need for continual efforts to explore ways of stimulating the human senses when delivering key messages, to get the point across to the target audience. Therefore, the fundamental challenge is in creating resonance with people.

## Methodology

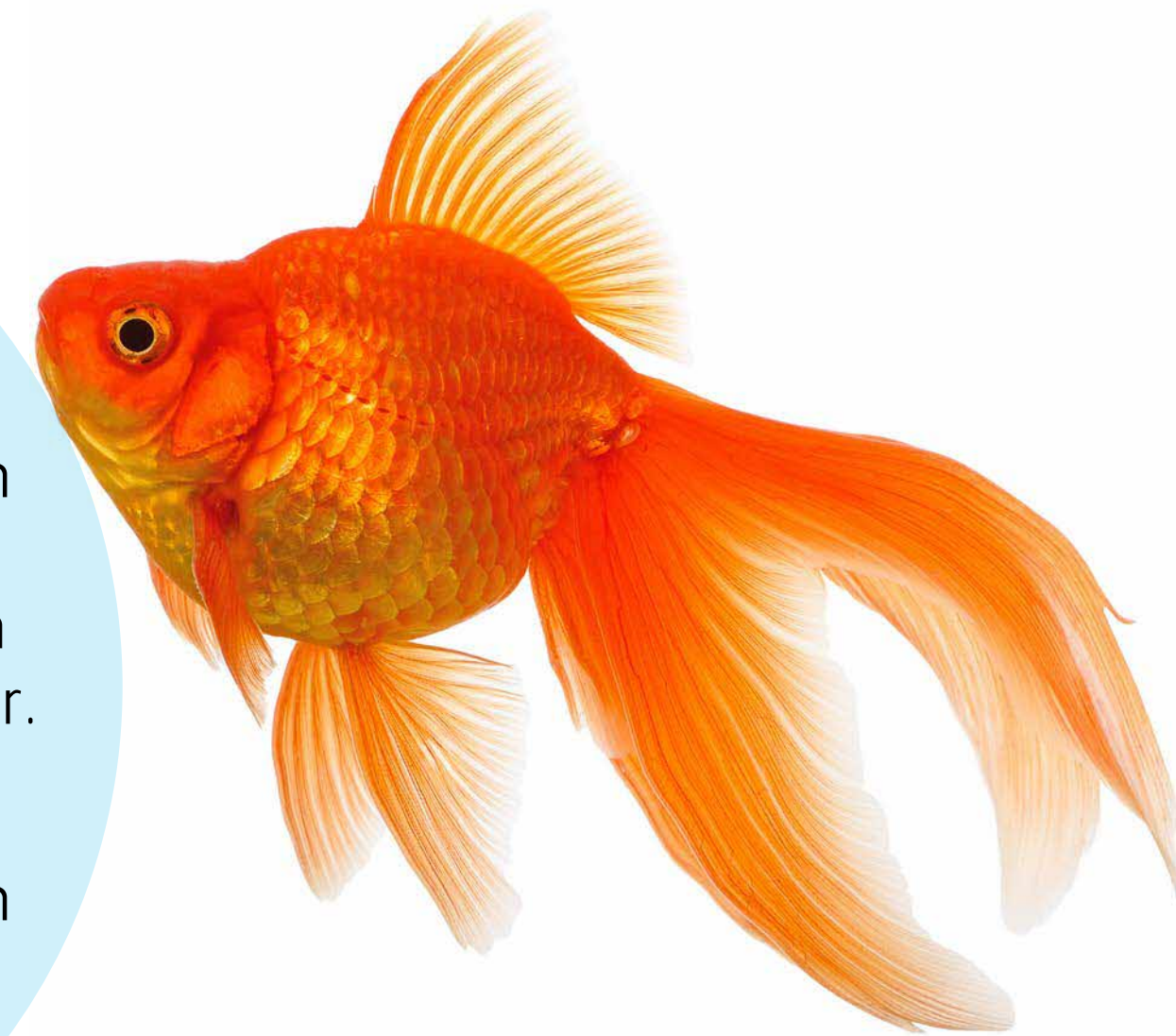
We established that communication is of paramount importance in preventing errors and one can easily find a plethora of literature and real-life encounters in support of this. Considering the complex nature of communication, the plan is to find a cost-effective conduit for the hand hygiene messages that can last longer than spoken words. Visuals fit the bill because:

- The brain processes images faster than text or any other forms of information
- Simple and clear graphics improve clarity of information and can achieve a level of consistency unlike speech
- There is better retention of information (one can refer back)

Intuitive visual reminders then present as important supporting measures that go hand-in-hand (pun intended) with existing interventions: clear verbal reminders, *Speak Up for Safety* videos which encourage open communication and patient empowerment.

### Fun fact

Contrary to popular belief that the goldfish has a memory span of 3 seconds, scientists discovered its capacity to learn and adopt patterns of behaviour. This means the goldfish can retain information for more than 3 seconds!  
(Source: National Geographic Wild, 2014.)

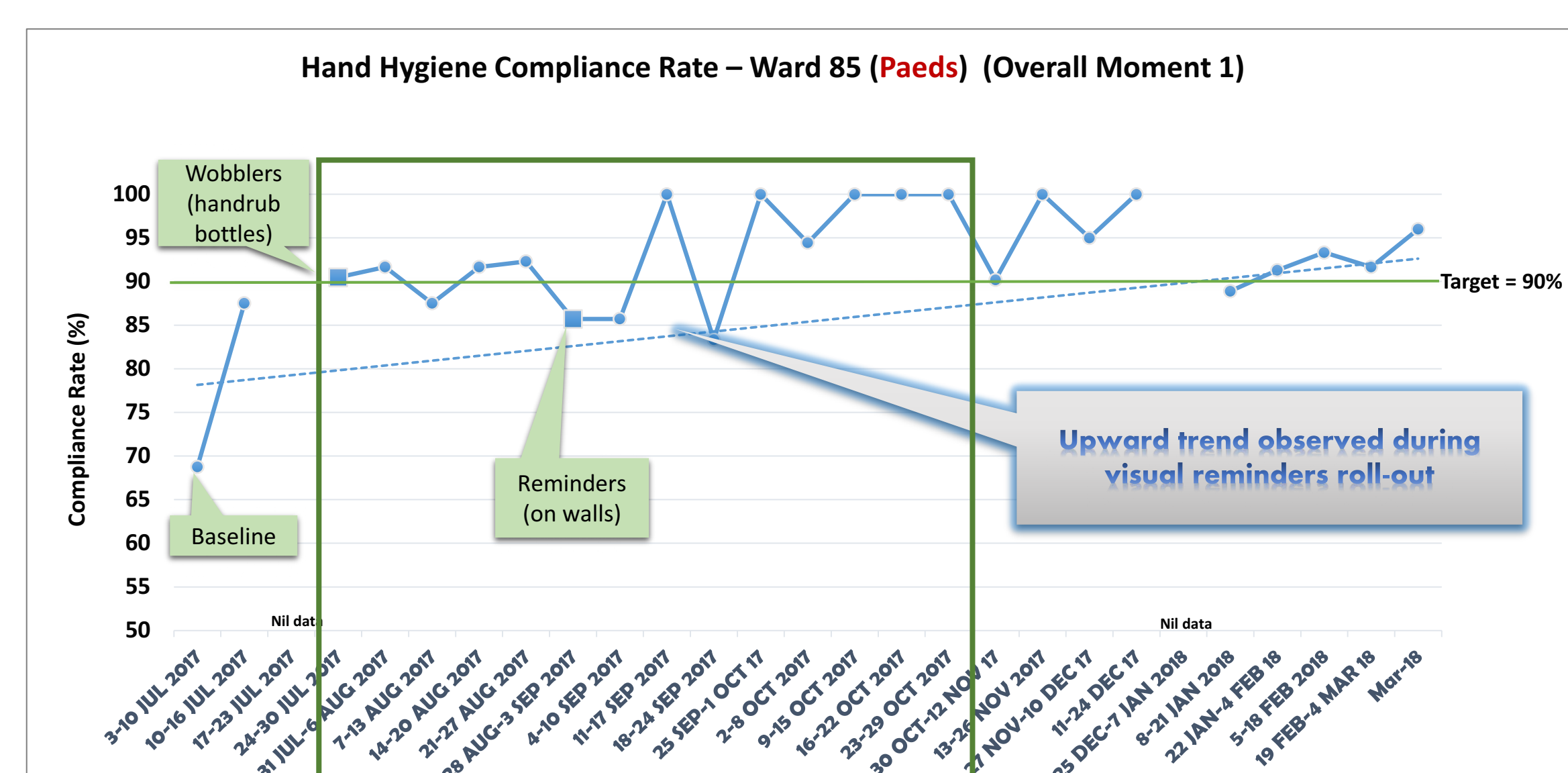
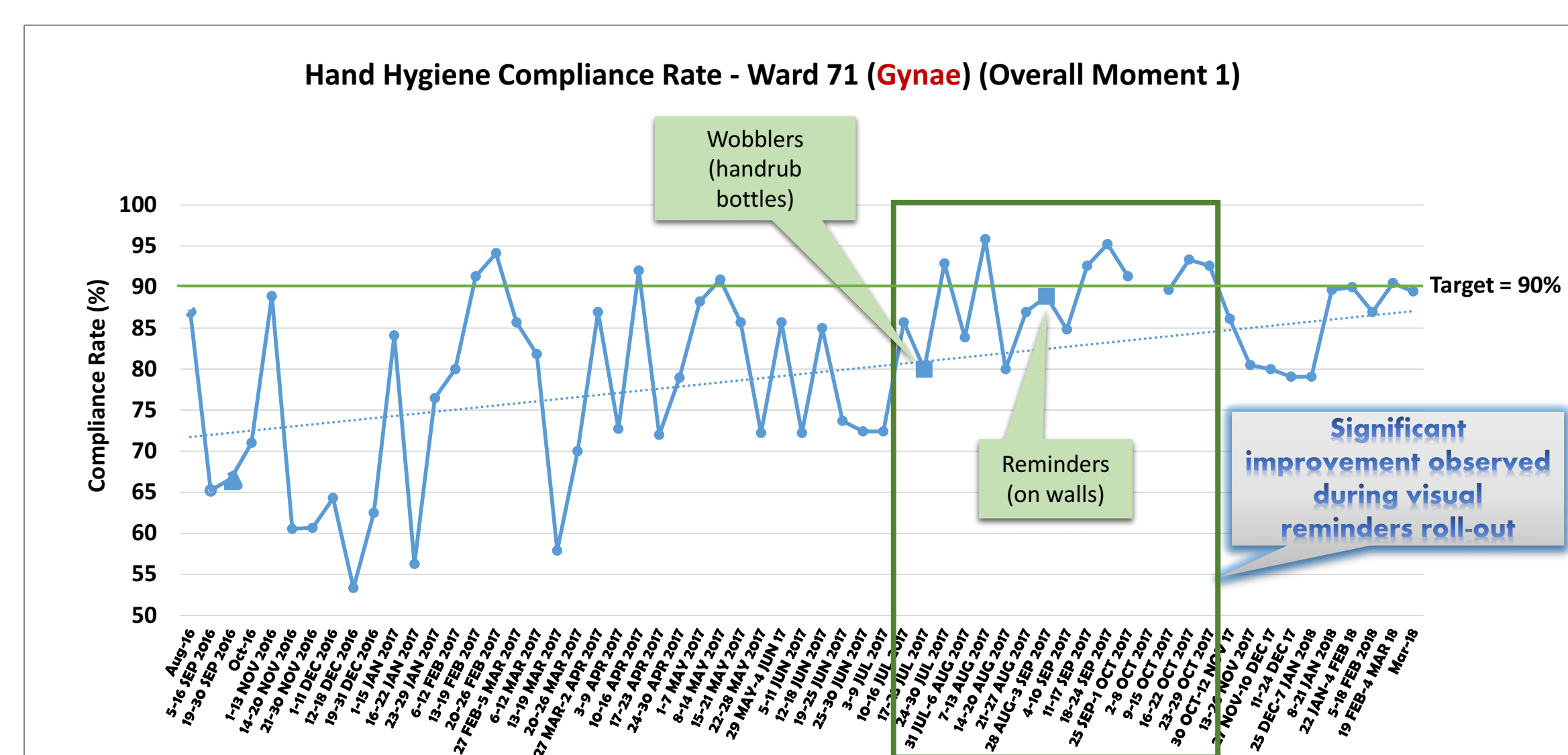


We focused on two types of bite-size visuals which serve as constant and upfront reminders for healthcare workers and visitors:

1. A5-sized placard positioned prominently at patients' bedside:
  - Headboard
  - Foot of the bed - as a default reminder from patients' perspective (first step to patient empowerment)
2. Wobblers placed on handrub bottles along ward corridors and at the foot of the patients' beds.



## Result



Ward Type	HH Compliance in Number of Wards after Visual Reminders	
	MOMENT 1	MOMENT 4
Paediatrics	12 wards ● x 7 ● x 3 ● x 2	● x 9 ● x 1 ● x 2
Obstetrics/Gynaecology	8 wards ● x 8	● x 7 ● x 1

Legend  
● Upward trend  
● Stable trend  
● Downward trend

Staff gave feedback that visual reminders with eye-catching designs and simple taglines are very useful as onsite reminders for practising HH.

Since the implementation of the new visual cues from August to October 2017, HH compliance rates have continued to rise for the majority of participating wards. An upward trend is noted for 16 out of 20 general wards, based on internal ward audits. The two anomalies in the Paediatric wards can be inferred to be attributed to environmental or systemic factors. Further investigations have to be done separately for a deeper understanding.

## Conclusion

The role of hand hygiene in ensuring safe care by preventing transmission of infection has long been established, yet some healthcare workers overlook this simplest of tasks, especially on a busy day. Guidelines alone do not improve HH compliance. As such, added impetus in the form of educational campaigns, regular face-to-face engagements, peer monitoring and formal evaluation, and especially visual reminders, provide a powerful augmentation of the infection control agenda. When used in conjunction with other pillars of communication (verbal reminders and video clips), impactful visual cues work well in boosting hand hygiene compliance rates.