

EDITORIAL

VAN DIE REDAKSIE

Sterility, A to Z

Surgery may only be undertaken under sterile conditions; this we have known since the time of Lister, and no surgeon today will for a moment deny the need for the strictest aseptic measures during operations. The question is, how sterile is sterile enough? We have tried a broad spectrum of techniques over the years to ensure aseptic conditions in theatres, and we cannot deny that some of them have been little short of laughable, either far exceeding or falling short of the minimum requirements. Sometimes the efforts have been reminiscent of attempts at sterilizing a space capsule.

The ideal is easy enough to define—no germs; certainly no pathogens should remain alive and if possible not even the killed germs should be present in view of the dangers of pyrogenic reactions. The problem is how to achieve the ideal state without running into practical difficulties so great that the system breaks down simply because it is too cumbersome. The now almost defunct 'no-touch' technique of the orthopaedic surgeons is a good example. The intention was laudable but the execution was impractical and, as was discovered after a time, unnecessary. There probably are a number of diehards who still maintain that the 'no-touch' technique is a **sine qua non** for all orthopaedic work, and the type of futile argument that is usually advanced seldom takes the true facts into account. There is no point in saying: 'Have you seen a knee joint that has gone septic after an operation?' Of course we have, but that does not prove anything one way or the other.

The only way to remain pragmatic is to keep the above-stated ideal clearly in view, and then to consider each action on its own merit in order to decide whether it really achieves what it sets out to do. Hands should be scrubbed for 10 minutes before an operation—or should they? Such a cate-

gorical statement may not be made unless it is backed by sound reasoning and research. As it stands it smacks somewhat of the mindless speed-limiting signs where road work is in progress, so beloved of the traffic authorities. Numerous articles have been published concerning the effects of prolonged scrubbing of hands before surgery and unless these findings are taken into account we are in danger of exhibiting a mere gut reaction when stating required scrubbing times.

It is equally necessary to take into account all the other possible factors which may influence the outcome of surgery as far as sterility is concerned. There is no point in carefully sterilizing every instrument and piece of towelling and then spending hours of precious time breaking down the resistance of the exposed wound edges. Today a tendency to regard the improved anaesthetic techniques as an invitation to over-restful and time-consuming surgery has evolved because there is no longer any need for the lightning procedures of the days of yore, when an amputation (including perhaps two of the assistant's fingers) had to be completed in a matter of minutes. Experience has shown, however, that this does not mean that the surgeon may linger over the operation to his heart's content.

The fact is that complete sterility is a pipedream and one must make sure that the natural resistance of the patient's tissues is given sufficient opportunity to withstand the onslaught of the bacteria present. On the other hand, one must not be under the impression that antibiotics and tissue resistance will take over where slipshod theatre techniques leave off. Above all we must be rational in our approach to sterility, and, whatever the various authorities in charge of operating theatres may believe or say, this is not always the case.

In Memoriam

That best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love.

Wordsworth

As mens so deur die **Tydskrif** blaaï kry mens die indruk dat die dokters in Suid-Afrika 'n gesonde spul is met 'n lang lewensverwagting. Hopelik is dit so, maar miskien word hierdie indruk slegs geskep omdat die kollegas van afgestorwenes dit nie die moeite werd ag om 'n paar reëls vir publikasie te skryf nie. Kom ons probeer om die saak reg te stel.

Ons wil liefs nie sê dat ons graag in Memoriam-berigte plaas nie want dit kan dalk verkeerd geïnterpreteer word, maar ons ontvang beslis graag bydraes om 'n afgestorwe kollega in die herinnering te roep. Sulke berigte moet verkieslik vergesel wees van 'n foto, veral 'n redelik onlangse een. Soms is lesers traag om te skryf omdat hulle onder die indruk is dat iemand anders dit of gaan doen of reeds gedoen het. Dit is 'n verkeerde houding want daar is geen rede waarom ons nie meer as een berig oor een persoon sal plaas nie. Al wat die redaksie in sulke gevalle sal doen is om onnodige herhaling van biografiese feite uit te sny.

Familielede van oorledenes sien graag dat hulle kollegas nie hul teenwoordigheid in die teater of in die loopgange van hospitale oornag vergeet het nie, en ons onderneem met plesier om gratis eksemplare van die **Tydskrif** met die betrokke doodsberig aan naasbestaandes te stuur. Lesers wat dus sulke berigte instuur moet asseblief aandui aan wie eksemplare gestuur moet word. Indien foto's teruggestuur moet word, dui dit asseblief duidelik aan, anders mag die oorspronklike foto dikwels deur die blokmaker gesny of beskadig word.

Ons Vereniging gedy en ons moet nou op die dié stadium versigtig wees dat ons nie daardie persoonlike kontak verloor en 'n amorfe organisasie word nie. Dit is al te lekker om deur 'n ou **Tydskrif** te blaaï en die werklike noue samehorigheid van die destydse lede aan te voel. Groter getalle bring natuurlik altyd 'n mate van onpersoonlikheid mee, maar in baie gevalle is dit miskien maar somer lamsakkerigheid.

INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS : INSTRUKSIES VIR SKRYWERS

The attention of authors is drawn to the revised 'Instructions for Authors' which appear regularly in the *Journal*. The most recent example will be found on p. xxxvii of the issue of 7 August 1971. Publication of papers can be expedited considerably if they are prepared in accordance with these instructions.

Die aandag van skrywers word vriendelik gevestig op die nuwe hersiene 'Instruksies vir Skrywers' wat gereeld gepubliseer word. Die jongste voorbeeld verskyn op bl. xx van die *Tydskrif* van 24 Julie 1971. Publikasie van bydraes kan aansienlik bespoedig word as hulle voorberei is in ooreenstemming met hierdie instruksies.