

Book Reviews

Hospital Infection Control. Setting up a Cost-effective Programme. SHAHEEN MEHTAR.
Pp. 190. Oxford University Press; 1992. £14.95. ISBN 0 19 262033 9.

Infection control has emerged as an important issue in the running costs of hospitals around the world. Not only is there the problem of patient morbidity and occasional mortality, but the risk of epidemic infection is ever present within the 'captive' and often severely immunocompromised patient. Dr Mehtar is well known for her knowledge, wisdom and teaching skills in the area of infection control practice. In this short book she distills much of her common sense approach to the whole range of infection control issues.

The book is divided into three sections which focus on infection control policy, the actual policies and the pragmatic aspects of dealing with infection. Chapter 2 provides a useful review of the economics of infection control, which I found particularly helpful in arguing the case for staff and facilities. The structure and function of the Infection Control Committee is carefully discussed and leads neatly into the specifics of policies and waste disposal. Practical advice is offered with regard to procedures such as the insertion and care of intravenous devices and urinary catheters, while antibiotic policies are not ignored.

Isolation policies are divided into categories A–C, which I find less helpful than the use of descriptive terms (enteric, respiratory, wound etc.). The emphasis placed on routine warm detergent washing of walls after a period of isolation care smacks of ritual. Curiously there appears little discussion of the use of masks, which are even omitted from the index. The advice concerning needle stick management is sound, apart from perhaps favouring the use of Zidovudine for the HIV-exposed, where efficacy remains unsubstantiated. Outbreak management is well described, although curiously there is no mention of the role of the Consultant in Communicable Disease Control. Finally, the disinfection of endoscopy equipment is only briefly touched on and could be strengthened.

This is a very practical manual. It contains the essential information required by all microbiologists, especially those in training, and all members of the Infection Control Team. It is also a valuable reference source for nursing staff working within High Dependency Units, as well as general ward areas, CSSD and theatre staff, domestic supervisors and other managerial personnel. At £14.95 it provides excellent value for money.

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Geographical and Environmental Epidemiology: Methods for Small-Area Studies.

P. ELLIOTT, J. CUZICK, D. ENGLISH & R. STERN, eds. Pp. 382. Oxford University Press, on behalf of the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe; 1992. £45.

There has been a growth in interest in epidemiological studies of disease 'clusters' and the subject has had a high profile due to the nuclear plant and cancer debate. This book gives a comprehensive account of current epidemiological thinking and is aimed at a wide audience because of the many disciplines involved. The book describes applications of familiar epidemiological techniques and the development of new ones. For example simple disease mapping is described as are the enhancements from computer Geographical Information Systems. Methodologies have been developed to get the best out of available data and suggestions are given for trying to collect better information.