

Focus on Nosocomial Infections: The Israeli Method

In late April and early May of 1980 an International Symposium on Nosocomial Infection Control was sponsored by The Sanford F. Kuvin Center for the Study of Infectious and Tropical Diseases at the Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical School in Jerusalem, Israel. Invited experts were asked to present data on selected topics and to participate actively in the Symposium. There are several features of the Symposium that merit comment:

(1) The convenor, Dr. Theodore Sacks, set the stage for a unique meeting. He charged the participants with the task of concentrating on future action based on past experience, and not to repeat what has been well documented. In his words, the "basic idea is to try to formulate answers to questions of where we are going and what we can do, rather than to describe where we are at present and the road we have travelled to get there." Although many organizers have similar meeting goals, such goals are rarely articulated so clearly.

(2) An additional underlying theme of the Symposium was highlighted: both the concepts and the application of different methodologies for generating data are as important as the results obtained. Thus, not only did the participants question the data presented, but the basic assumptions and methods of the studies

were evaluated critically. In few scientific meetings is there a priority for scrutiny of the study methods.

(3) Unlike most meetings with 5-15 minute discussion periods for each paper, there were at least 2½ hours for discussion on each of the five days. These discussions were productive in part because of the efforts made by various moderators to maintain a continual focus on the issues presented in the series of 30-45 minute papers.

(4) In moderating the closing discussion of the meeting, Dr. Edward Kass challenged the audience of 100 guests and participants to provide *data* on effective control measures and *data* on effective practices, including such routine and time-honored practices as surveillance, isolation, and the activities of infection control practitioners themselves. What followed was heat, then some light, and finally appreciation for the courage required of a scientific "devil's advocate."

The Symposium was an open scientific exchange that was successful perhaps because of the small size of the group and the conducive atmosphere generated by the Israeli hosts. It was a refreshing departure from conventional scientific gatherings and perhaps a model for those willing to seek truth. We applaud the efforts of the Hadassah Medical School and anticipate the proceedings (including much of the unabridged discussions), which will be published early in 1981 in *REVIEWS OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES*.

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