

that the most efficient antiseptic yet known is perchloride of mercury, or corrosive sublimate. It destroys germs more quickly and more surely than any other, and should therefore be preferred. The only objection to it is that it is a powerful poison, but this only affects its use for douching purposes. There is not a single instance known, so far as I am aware, of any ill effect having followed its external use, *i.e.*, as a disinfectant of hands and appliances, and, even when used as a douche, it need not be a source of danger if certain precautions are attended to, which I will describe presently. In Hospitals, a solution of corrosive sublimate of the required strength is kept ready for use, or a strong solution is provided from which a solution of the proper strength can be easily and quickly prepared. In private practice, however, it is inconvenient to have to carry a large bottle about with one, and various plans have been suggested for avoiding the need of this.

At St. Thomas's Hospital, the Students engaged in obstetric work always carry with them a box of antiseptic powders, each powder containing ten grains of corrosive sublimate, some tartaric acid, and a little colouring matter. One of these powders dissolved in a pint of water makes a solution of the strength of one part in a thousand, which is the strength I always use and advise to be used for disinfecting the hands and the various appliances. Instead of powders, a small bottle of solution of corrosive sublimate may be carried in the bag of such strength that a small quantity added to a pint of water will give a solution of the required strength. A solution of one in fifty answers the purpose very well. Of this, a fluid ounce, or two table-spoonfuls, added to a pint of water, makes a solution of one in a thousand.

In preparing antiseptic solutions there should be no guessing; the quantities should be scrupulously measured. A basin of the mercurial solution ready for use should be kept on the wash-stand, and renewed once a day. Into this basin the hands and wrists are to be dipped, in the manner already described, immediately before and after performing any duty which involves touching the patient's genital organs. And into the same basin, or one containing a precisely similar solution, are to be plunged all sponges, vaginal tubes, syringes, and instruments for at least a minute before use. Macintosh sheets, after being used, should be well wiped with a similar solution. For the washing of the external genitals, the mercurial solution (one in one thousand) should be diluted to one in two thousand, by adding to it an exactly equal quantity of hot water.

Soap, it must be remembered, destroys the antiseptic properties of perchloride of mercury, so that all soap must be rinsed off before the hands

are soaked in the antiseptic solution. Another great point to note is that different antiseptics should not be mixed together, as many of them destroy each other's activity.

When a Nurse is instructed to douche her patient with a solution of corrosive sublimate, she must ascertain from the Medical attendant what strength he wishes the solution to be, and she must take care that none of the solution is left in the passages. It is always uncomfortable for a patient to find that there is from time to time an escape of fluid on to the draw-sheet after a douche has been administered, and the bed-pan removed, and in the case of poisonous substances like corrosive sublimate and carbolic acid, there is the risk of the retained fluid becoming absorbed and giving rise to symptoms of poisoning. To prevent either of these occurrences, it is necessary to press well down over the region of the womb after every douche, and so squeeze out of the vagina any fluid that happens to remain there.

I have spoken chiefly of corrosive sublimate, because no other antiseptic can compare with it for efficiency. Probably the next best is carbolic acid. But, to show you what a long way it comes behind corrosive sublimate, I may mention that Koch, the great German bacteriologist, made some comparative experiments as to the relative power possessed by various reputed antiseptics, these two amongst the rest. For the purpose of these experiments he took certain disease-germs known to be more difficult to kill than any germs yet discovered. He found that, whereas a solution of carbolic acid (one in twenty) took two days to kill these germs, they were destroyed in a moment by a solution of corrosive sublimate of the strength of one in five thousand. No other antiseptic substance has stood the test of experience in the same way that corrosive sublimate has done, and none has earned, like it, the right to be recognised as the most powerful antiseptic yet known. In obstetric work, where such valuable lives are at stake, we ought not to be satisfied with anything but the very best, and it is on that account that I advise the use of corrosive sublimate.

At the same time, I am not unmindful of the fact that it is by the use of carbolic acid that the great triumphs of antiseptic surgery have been chiefly won, and if I now prefer corrosive sublimate, it is not because I have lost faith in the antiseptic to which we owe so much, but because, when a still more efficient antiseptic has been discovered, I feel bound, in the interests of our patients, to adopt and recommend it. Carbolic acid is still preferred by many of my professional brethren, who hesitate to turn their backs on an old friend that has done them good service. I would just remind those of you who have been

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