
Book Review

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Decontamination in Hospitals and Healthcare. Edited by J. T. Walker. (Pp. 678. £229. ISBN 978-1-84569-636-8, hb.) Woodhead Publishing, 2014.

The editor of this important book aimed to ‘pull together a number of areas in which I have worked’ in his 25 years working in science. He acknowledges several influences in his career, and mentions several experts who have died recently. This underplays the achievement here, gathering together, as it does, many world experts in one tome. The topic of decontamination is a complex one; many of the strands are in the process of change due to innovations and or changes in regulation. Increasingly healthcare has moved into the community and the title of the book reflects this trend. Decontamination is a topic that many infection prevention and control professionals find difficult and attendance of decontamination courses, meetings or conferences are invariably fully booked. Many countries struggle to develop their own national experts in the field. While there are other books that do include this topic, it certainly deserves the special attention given here, even more so given the increased global profile of healthcare-associated infection and the related issues of antimicrobial resistance.

The book comprises 25 chapters with authors’ contact details included. The editor comments that the book was completed to tight deadlines and is as up-to-date as possible. An issue with this field is that it is evolving so rapidly that readers will want to be updated fairly regularly. There is no clue as to when this would next be progressed and neither is there a CD included which would enable readers to explore the references provided more readily. This is something that some publishers now provide.

Part I comprises five chapters covering the fundamentals of decontamination in hospitals and healthcare. This provides a solid background and informs or reminds the readers of the basics, the history, standards and regulatory aspects. A

specific and very informative chapter covers the situation in Europe and some other continents. Part II comprises 13 chapters reviewing many different fields of practice, e.g. gaseous decontamination, biocides (which I found to be a little too brief), prion decontamination, the role of nursing, and there is also a very useful and informative chapter on the provision of safe water. Part III comprises six chapters covering the complex field of decontamination of surgical instruments and endoscopes. However, readers should be warned that this is UK-centric and they would need to also consider their own regulatory framework? Two chapters review new technologies; these are well written and usefully gather together information from many sources. The final two chapters describe methods of flexible endoscope disinfection/sterilization, topics of the utmost importance to healthcare and infection prevention and control professionals.

I did not find the order of the chapters to be optimal. For example, there are two non-consecutive chapters on dentistry. Some of the topics, e.g. the use of copper to ‘debulk pathogens’, no-touch automation and new technologies for controlling organisms could be grouped together in a new ‘innovation’ section? This section could have started with the chapter on future trends in part 1? Testing strategies and standards for disinfectants would better reside in part 1 rather than part 2? Perhaps this is a reflection of how rapidly the book was brought together? A second edition should re-organize this to make it a more effective ‘companion’. The price of the book would probably prevent the professional purchasing it, but I do think hospitals (and many libraries) should have a copy so that their relevant staff can access it. I am certainly glad I now have my own copy.

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