

Another brick in the wall!

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 15th Congress of the WFHSS for which the golden city of Prague is the perfect setting.

As was the case already last year once again the congress will be the place where East meets West. But this time it will be on a somewhat smaller scale as the organizers have focused on Eastern and Western Europe. And rightly so because, in contrast to what is widely accepted as a matter of fact, on the old continent too there still is a big quality gap between sterilization as practiced in different departments, in different countries, in the East and the West.

Economic recovery and the development of sterilization are hampered by the financial problems lots of countries have to deal with today. Moreover the very somber predictions made by the “club of Rome” in 1972 are turning into stark reality today. All this throws a dark shadow on the future. To give hope to people the conflict models, that today seem to dominate, have to be swapped for cooperation models.

Because the frame of reference is simply too big for an individual he or she can feel sometimes at a complete loss. Because the individual is not in a position to have any impact on what is happening, the solution is straightforward and self-evident namely to withdraw onto one's own base. In other words we have to make sure that we have put our own house in order before we look at our neighbors. If everyone is sweeping his/her own stretch of the pavement the whole street will be clean. For sterilization this means that each department has to deliver optimal quality and that the national sterilization society has as its task to ensure a homogenous and uniform quality level in the sterilization departments throughout the country. For the

WFHSS this means that it is a source of information, that it remains a knowledge center, that it stimulates the setting up of societies in countries where they do not yet exist and that it provides a forum where the national societies can meet. Each department, each society should be aware of its role and responsibilities and should strive to be a frontrunner locally, nationally or internationally. This as far as the rational, technical aspects of sterilization practices are concerned.

We also should not lose sight of the social dimension which is linked to each human activity. The challenge for sterilization departments is also to create a working environment in which our members of staff love to do their jobs, where they have the opportunity of developing themselves and where they can realize the objectives of the sterilization department namely to provide a medical device of good quality to the care provider. This should be our contribution to the wellbeing of the patients, our brick in the wall of a better world.

Because despite the fact that the CSSD provides a facilitating service in the hospital, its contribution may not be minimized. This does not mean that our department is not important, on the contrary. But we should not forget that we decide ourselves whether we are taken seriously because we can only be as important as the service we provide and as the commitment we show. Therefore our product should be of the highest possible quality. We can and have to be big in something small; we should be committed for 100 % to this task. The higher our conviction to do this, the more important the CSSD will be not in but for the hospital.

This requires permanent alertness and a lot of empathy for the patient. The latter is not always easy as we never get the stimulating emotional feedback which results from direct patient contact. Our

motivation, the dedication of the members of staff in our departments has to arise from the realization of the importance of our service within the framework of the total care provided in the hospital and the recognition of it by management. To the extent that the members of staff of sterilization departments feel valued, they will also perform better and their identification with a high quality end product will be higher. Their sense of self-esteem and self-respect reflects on the end product and the department and vice versa. The extent to which the CSSD is given the recognition it deserves is directly related to the quality of that end product.

Sterilization has had a long struggle for the recognition of its identity, its separate statute in the hospital, its autonomy. This fight has been won. Also the conviction that validated reprocessing is a fully controllable risk (Axel Kramer) which has little or nothing at all to do with infection prevention finally found solid ground. The time has come for the further integration of the department into the hospital. This can be achieved when the department puts its expertise at the disposal of the hospital such as in logistics and in the cleaning and disinfecting of flexible endoscopes. These are domains in which we can make our mark and where we can, with our experience, make a substantial contribution to the efficiency of the hospital and to the care of the patient.

Prague is a city of art and culture. It symbolizes the duality and complementarity, the individuality and the importance of teamwork in the department. Art is the intricate mix of skill, inspiration and emotion at the level of the individual. Because art delves into what it means to be a human being it also transgresses national borders to attain a universal appeal. In sterilization too a lot depends on the individual members of staff. Their knowledge, competence, attitude

and motivation are the determining factors in the provision of sterile medical devices of a good quality.

But these members of staff also function in a team. A sterile medical device is in fact the fusion and the result of the work done by a number of people. The culture in a department, in other words, the level of development a particular department has reached, determines the outcome. Culture is synonymous with quality. However, this level also depends on the culture within sterilization in general.

The congresses of the WFHSS provide the opportunity to the world of sterilization to define this culture, to evaluate what has been achieved and to set objectives in order to lift sterilization onto a higher level. All sterilization departments all over the world should participate in this process and play an active role in working out the international guidelines and in describing the quality sterilization departments should provide.

The essential precondition is that sterilization distances itself from fetishes and voodoo practices and not only confirms but also reinforces the processes of sustainable change on the basis of scientific research and evidence.

We trust that this congress will be the synthesis of state-of-the-art practices and an inspired vision for the future. The speakers we have invited will set out their views on how to bring about a culture of excellence in sterilization and which future developments we should embrace.

There are plenty of challenges but there is also the burning ambition to meet these head on and thus to make a substantial contribution to realizing the quality standards hospitals and the patients expect from us. Only with your co-operation can we implement the necessary

improvements to sterilization practices and make the sterilization department a vital link in the provision of quality care in the hospital. Everyone should take her or his co-responsibility for it!

Finally as you all know this is my last appearance as president of the WFHSS. I would like to make use of this opportunity to thank you for everything you have done for sterilization but even more importantly for all your patients, wherever in the world. I would like to express the hope that you will continue along the same road you have been travelling. It has been a privilege to me to have been your president.

I wish the new committee, under the direction of Christine Denis, every success in the further promotion of good sterilization practice all over the world.

I wish you a successful conference. Thanks very much for your presence.

Wim Renders

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