

Book review: Understanding infection prevention and control

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Book Title

Understanding Infection Prevention and Control

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First edition, 2010, 434 pages.

(Publication price: £33.50, but available through Amazon, UK at a discount).

Professor Shaheen Mehtar is a highly motivated and hard working medical microbiologist. She began her career in London – later transferring to Cape Town. In both countries she has organised teaching and conferences on Infection Control at National and International levels, and has been an active IFIC Council member – arranging at least two IFIC meetings in South Africa. She was a contributor to the IFIC book – ‘Basic Concepts of Infection Control’.

This book differs from the ‘Basic Concepts’ in three ways. Firstly as it is written by a single author the text

is more coherent and easier to read. The chapters follow the same format, starting with a list of ‘learning outcomes’. The text is well laid out, with clear Section and Paragraph headings, some straightforward diagrams and tables, and a list of relevant references for further reading.

Secondly while ‘Basic Concepts’ concentrates on ‘what to do’ Shaheen also gives the context and tells you ‘why to do it’. For example there is a section on: ‘Why do infections occur in hospitals’, with subheadings on: administrative factors, environmental factors, spread

of pathogens (hand hygiene is stressed), and clinical factors (including the vulnerable patient with the dangers of antibiotic use).

Finally the material is more comprehensive than that in 'Basic Concepts'. It includes an excellent 'Introduction to Microbiology', a chapter on 'Hospital design', and one on 'Decontamination' (including sterile supply departments). Finally there is a chapter on 'Gathering and using information', in which a very clear description of setting up a research project (something the author has done many times) is given. The approach to statistics is so clear that even I (who always had the services of the University Statistics Dept), could understand it.

In these days when 'Healthcare Associated Infection' has replaced 'Hospital Infection' the Chapter on 'Communicable Disease Control' is welcome as it covers Infection Control in the Community and the important topic of outbreak control. The only surprise

is the absence of any description of antibiotic policies, but this is deliberate. Only some basic facts about antibiotics are presented – the reader is advised to do further reading on this topic.

The author's aim was to provide a book suitable for workers in both developed and 'LMI' (Lower and Middle Income) countries. She has had extensive experience of all the topics she writes about in both environments. For all she notes in bold text in the introduction: A good IPC (Infection Control and Prevention) programme is probably the single most cost effective investment any government can make in health delivery'. There is data here for a wide range of healthcare workers, although clearly not all sections are relevant to everyone. With this in mind the book is exceedingly good value, and should be available globally to Administrators as well as Infection Control staff.

The author is to be congratulated on the outcome of her many months of full time effort in producing such an excellent book.