Safety over the Years

Washing Hands

During our recent global pandemic, people were required to wash their hands in an effort to stop the virus from going from things they touched, to their immune system. However, washing hands were not always a commonly used method to get rid of bacteria. In fact medical professionals did not even know that washing hands got rid of many parts of bacteria in our hands. The person we owe this knowledge to is a Hungarian doctor, who was named, Ignaz Semmelweis.

Washing hands: Then vs Now

Autopsies

With fewer doctors believing that evil spirits caused illnesses, these doctors became more interested in anatomy. They would operate on corpses to figure out more about human bodies and to collect data.

Maternity Wards

The same doctors, who would do autopsies on corpses, would help deliver babies.

The Problem?

The corpses that the doctors would operate on would carry illnesses and bacteria that is harmful to people and the doctors would not sterilize their hands. As a result, these harmful germs would go from their hands to the mothers giving birth and they would die.

Semmelweis’s Solution

Lucky for humanity, a man named Ignaz Semmelweis noticed that many women would pass after giving birth. Dr. Semmelweis conducted many experiments trying to find out why they would pass when doctors would help them with childbirth but when midwives would help them they were perfectly fine. When one of this colleagues died from the same illness that the women would pass from, he had a revelation: this fever that caused the women to pass, did not only affect women, it affected everyone in the hospital. He found that the difference between doctors and midwives was that the midwives did not touch the corpses. He hypothesized that there were particles in the bodies doctors would operate on and they would go on the women giving birth which caused them to get harmful particles which eventually led to death. He used chlorine to get rid of any bad smell from the corpse then helped deliver babies. This caused a drastic decrease in death from childbirth.

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Now

Even though at first doctors rejected Semmelweis’s idea, modern day health professionals follow Semmelweis and wash their hands. The C.D.C. says that hand hygiene is a very important way to prevent infections. Thousands of people every day are saved by Dr. Semmelweis’s discovery.
Sources:

https://www.cdc.gov/media/pressrel/r2k0306c.htm

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