

Antibiotic era threatened

MRSA outbreak blamed on flagrant overmedications

There are numerous reasons why slavish adherence to infection control procedures should be an avid and on-going concern to all operating room nursing personnel. An especially important reason, among others, is the alarming ability of certain bacteria to develop resistances to antibiotics.

The recent outbreak of MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) in England this past Summer could be considered a classic example of what some are calling the "creations of diagnostically destitute doctors". Already, the MRSA strain has killed hundreds of hospital patients in England and Australia, where it first appeared in the early 70s.

Widespread strain

The first outbreak in the UK occurred in 1981, and in a two-month period starting in April of last year, it was reported that in London alone 30 died from the MRSA infection. The strain has also been reported in Europe, the United States, and, according to the Laboratory Centre for Disease Control in Ottawa, there have been a few reported isolates in Canada as well.

MRSA bacteria are a mutation of harmless bacteria that occur naturally on the skin and in the nasal mucosa. Because of careless and indiscriminate use of broad spectrum antibiotics, MRSA has become invulnerable to most antibiotics. Broad spectrum antibiotics are anti-microbial agents effective against a wide variety of micro-organisms; some penicillins, for example, are broad spectrum. The exceptions where MRSA is vulnerable to anti-microbial agents are the more rare antibiotic preparations, and vancomycin, which is often indicated when penicillins and cephalosporins are ineffective.

Minor infections dangerous

Dr. Richard Smith, one of the Editors of the British Medical Journal (the source for the contents of this article, October, 1986) pointed out that, should MRSA become resistant to vancomycin,

which is a highly toxic anti-microbial drug, "...the practice of medicine could be put back to the days when even minor infections could kill."

Dr. Ken Harvey, director of microbiology at the Royal Melbourne Hospital in Australia, where the outbreak was first reported in the early 70s, told reporters that a MRSA outbreak claimed the lives of hundreds of elderly hospital patients in Eastern Australia.

Diagnostically destitute

Calling broad spectrum antibiotics "the refuge of the diagnostically destitute," Dr. Harvey said "we may look back at the antibiotic era as just a passing phase in the history of medicine, an era in which a great natural resource was squandered and where the bugs proved smarter than the scientist."

The ORNAC recommended standards available in slide presentation format

Both English and French versions of the ORNAC Recommended Standards for Operating Room Nursing Practice are available in print form and slide presentation. Originally shown during the last National Conference in Montreal, this slide presentation is available for rental. The cost is \$30.00 plus postage.

If your group is planning on ordering the tape, please allow sufficient time for processing and delivery. The slide-tape presentation is available from the chairman of the of the "Technical O.R. Standards Committee", Gloria Stephens, 2864 West 3rd Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V6K 1M7.

Many hospitals have purchased these Standards for use in their Quality Assurance Programs.

Those interested in obtaining a copy of the Recommended Standards (\$12.00) can do so by contacting either Ann Robinson, for the French language version, or Valerie Shirreff, for the English. Readers will find the addresses to write to under the ORNAC Executive Listings on page 28.

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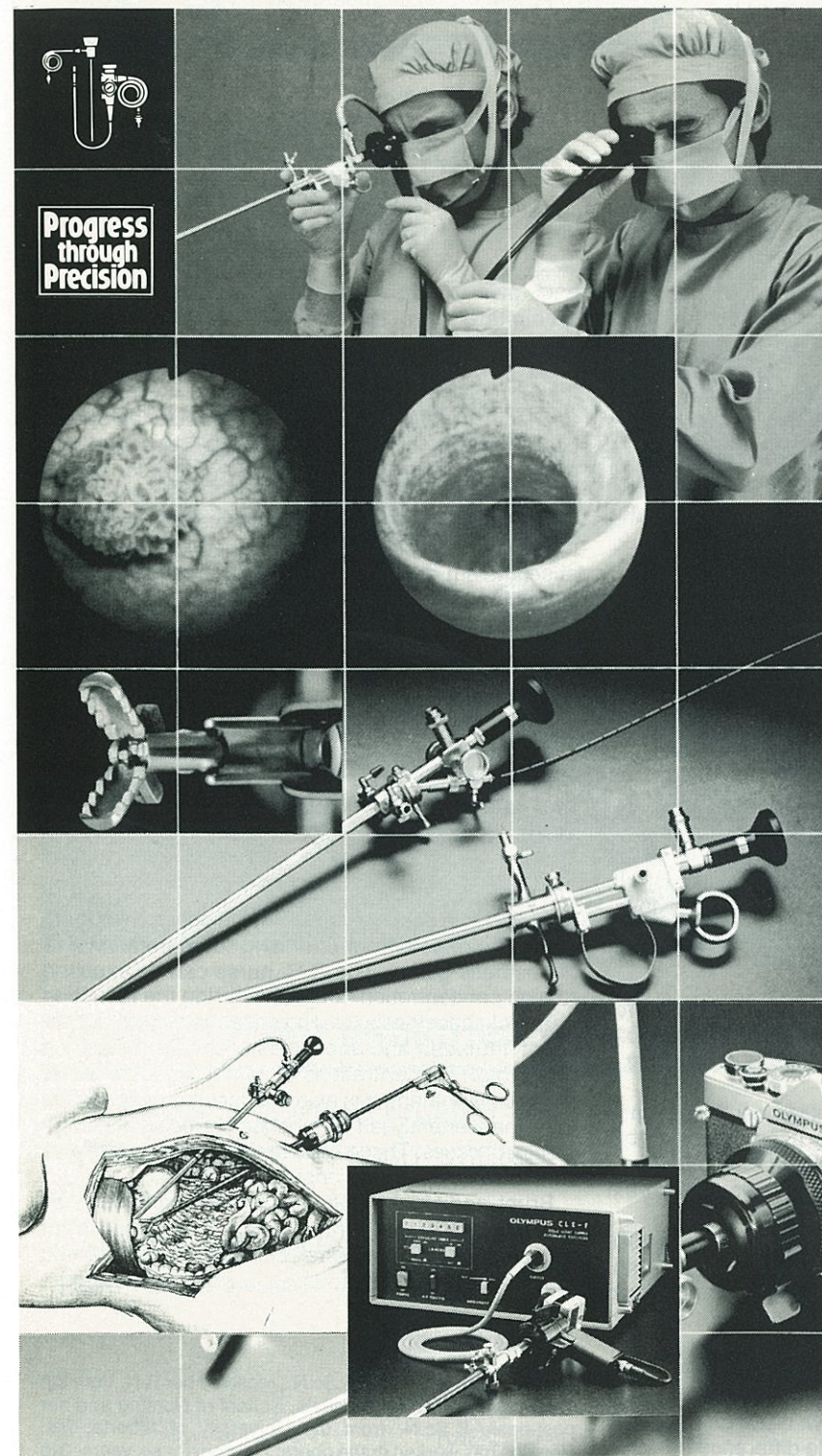
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