

## SEMMELWEIS AGAINST PUBERNER FEVER IN HUNGARY

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**Abstract:** The article describes the life and discovery about hand hygiene of Professor Semmelweis. Also given is the cause of Semmelweis' death which is due to "Hospital Death" which resulted in blood poisoning.

**Key words:** Hand hygiene, Semmelweis, hospital, death, pregnant, woman, blood, savior, mother, heals.

The history of hand hygiene began in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1847, hand hygiene pioneer Ignaz Semmelweis advocated handwashing with a chlorinated lime solution to reduce the horrendously high death rates in maternity hospitals.

Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis (1818-1865) was a Hungarian obstetrician, professor, who laid the empirical foundations of antiseptics, essentially becoming the founder of this method, which opened a new era in the development of all areas of medicine. Semmelweis was born on July 17, 1818 in Hungary, in Tabane (now part of Budapest) in the family of a successful grocer. Graduated from the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Vienna with a specialization in surgery and obstetrics. At the end of 1846 - beginning of 1847, Semmelweis went to Dublin for scientific purposes, and then went on vacation to Venice, partly to somewhat dispel his heavy mood from the impressions he experienced in the clinic. In his absence, his beloved professor of forensic medicine, Koletchka, tragically died in Vienna. During the autopsy, he accidentally injured his finger, after which he developed sepsis. Semmelweis, who thought so much about the cause of childbed fever, quickly realized that Koletchka's death occurred for the same reason that women in labor died. Corpse poison entered the professor's blood and remained on the lancet. Semmelweis suggested that women in labor died in the same way: they were infected in the birth canal. At the Vienna Medical School in those years, the so-called anatomical direction dominated: obstetricians were fond of dissecting corpses. Semmelweis also worked daily in the anatomical theater, and then went to the obstetric clinic and examined pregnant women.

After the death of his friend, Semmelweis wrote: "God alone knows the number of those who, through my fault, ended up in the coffin. I have dealt with corpses so much, as rarely have any obstetricians... I want to awaken the conscience of those who do not yet understand where death comes from, and recognize the truth that I learned too late..."

Dr. Semmelweis began to fight for cleanliness in hospitals, but, as you know, many great truths were initially considered blasphemy. Colleagues openly laughed at him when he tried to outsmart "hospital death" with a piece of bleach. Among his opponents were doctors with European names. Even Virchow spoke out against Semmelweis. In 1858, in a report to the Berlin Society of Obstetricians, he expressed such considerations about puerperal fever for

which even Hungarian midwives ridiculed him - how high, in comparison with Berlin, the knowledge of puerperal fever in Hungary stood then.

Ignaz Semmelweis was given the title of Privatdozent with great reluctance in 1850, while his rights were limited. He could only conduct demonstration classes on a dummy. Semmelweis's innovations seemed to his colleagues an absurd eccentricity, unworthy of the title of doctor. And he paid for them by expulsion from his native walls of the Vienna Clinic. He could not bear such humiliation and left for his hometown of Pest, where he soon took the place of a doctor in the obstetric department of St. Rochus Hospital. In the same year, Semmelweis gave three reports, which were widely discussed. Semmelweis was appointed assistant professor of theoretical obstetrics at the university.

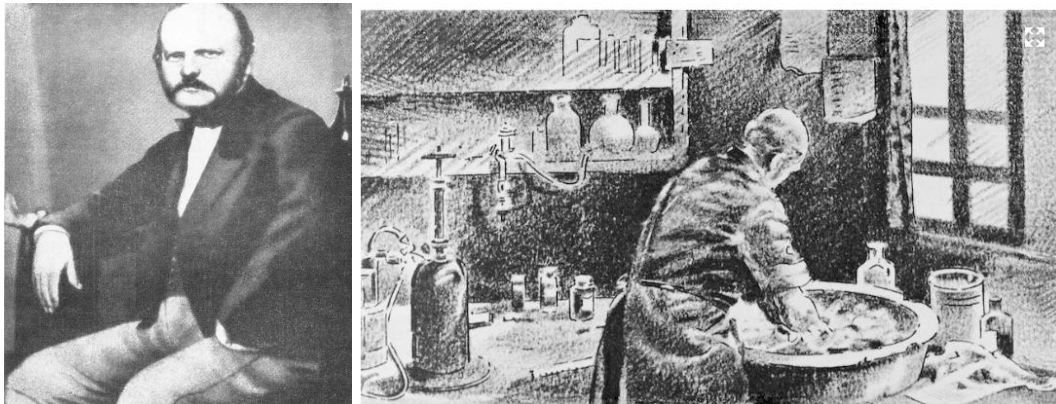
In 1855, Semmelweis became professor of obstetrics at the University of Pest. He was oppressed by the negative attitude of many scientists towards his discovery; not only did scientific truth suffer, his pride suffered. Professor Semmelweis published a number of articles on puerperal fever from 1858 to 1860 and eventually produced the classic work *Die Aethiologie der Begrifff und die Prophylaxis des Kindbettfiebers*. Semmelweis's book managed to convince a few; a number of prominent specialists remained opponents of Semmelweis's teachings. A certain young assistant published a paper on puerperal fever in which he distorted Semmelweis's point of view. This essay received an award from the Würzburg Medical Faculty.

In 1861-1862, Semmelweis wrote five letters: four to famous doctors and a general letter to all obstetricians. In the last letter, the author threatens that he will appeal to the entire society with a warning about the danger that threatens every pregnant woman from obstetricians and midwives who do not wash their hands before the examination.



Still from the feature film “Semmelweis - Savior of Mothers”, GDR, 1950

In 1861, his book was published, establishing a link between puerperal fever (also known as “puerperal fever”) and poor hand hygiene by attending physicians [9].



*Ignaz Semmelweis, 1858*

*A lone attempt to resist the inevitable brought Dr. Semmelweis to the brink between life and death. Misunderstood, rejected and ridiculed by his colleagues, he became mentally ill. The great pioneering doctor spent two weeks buried alive in a mental hospital in Döbling. Shortly before entering the insane asylum, during one of his last operations, which Semmelweis performed on a newborn, he cut the finger of his right hand. After panaritium, he developed an abscess of the pectoral muscles, which broke into the pleural area.*

*“Hospital death,” the cause of which Semmelweis saw as blood poisoning, did not spare him either... On August 13, 1865, death overcame him. During the autopsy, he was found to have dropsy of the brain. 47 years—that’s the length of time heaven gave him. In 1891, the body of Ignaz Semmelweis was transported to Budapest. With donations from doctors around the world, a monument was erected to him on September 20, 1906, on which they wrote “Savior of Mothers.”*



*Monument to Ignaz Semmelweis in Budapest*



*Florence Nightingale introduced hygiene measures, including staff hand washing, into Crimean War hospitals and statistically proved that these measures reduced mortality among soldiers. Over time, evidence has evolved and hand hygiene has been shown to help prevent a range of respiratory and diarrheal diseases and is also critical to the control of bacterial infections in health care settings.*

*The work was carried out according to an applied project AL-6222052507 TSTU*

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