Foreword

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It is a particular honour to have been asked to act as Chairman for the 3rd Asian Pacific Congress on Antisepsis. Having trained in Glasgow Royal Infirmary it is also a pleasure to feel that in some small way I am adding my weight to the pioneering work of Lord Lister whose clinical application of the carbolic spray was undertaken in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary and published in the Lancet in 1867. In his seminal work, Lister was able to reduce his amputation mortality rate from 46 to 15% by using carbolic acid for hand washing, spraying throughout the operation and prior to wound closure. These results were astounding given that in the 1870s, during the Franco-Prussian war, there were 13,500 amputations and 10,000 deaths from surgical infections and gangrene, a 76% mortality rate. All over Europe the use of carbolic acid was increasingly adopted throughout the late 19th century.

Soon other antiseptics were developed, including iodine by 1874 and the hypochlorites by 1915. Antiseptic use gained a major role as the main method of infection control particularly during the wars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The importance of adequate debridement was also recognised at this time. Further improvements in wound management followed the introduction of antibiotics in the mid 20th century.

Having been established for many decades as the premiere method of infection control, the latter half of the 20th century has seen questions being raised about the use of antiseptics in open wounds. Wound management itself has undergone immense changes in the past 3 decades, with the emergence of the moist wound concept of healing, accompanied by an enormous armamentarium of new wound pharmaceuticals. Until recently the method of wound dressing had relatively little impact on the quality of wound healing. Rather it was whether the wound was or would become infected which determined outcome. But with the use of prophylactic antibiotics and adequate debridement, was there any further use for antiseptics?

Alexander Fleming in 1919 was first to voice a note of caution on antiseptics pointing out that injudicious use could damage tissue. Since then a volume of literature has shown that in vitro antiseptics are powerful chemicals which can have deleterious effects on tissues. A balance in their use is therefore required, and more so today than ever before.

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The 3rd Asian Pacific Congress on Antisepsis will go a long way to redress the balance in the matter of antisepsis. This congress has gathered a most impressive group of international scientists and clinicians who will discuss their work in antisepsis and undoubtedly define in precise terms the benefits and the cautionary aspects of antiseptic use. There is no question that

antiseptics have a major and indeed vital role to play clinically, and it is timely that we produce a balanced consensus for their judicious use.

It is therefore my pleasure to act as opening Chairman of this congress, and I wish all the delegates a most enjoyable and informative conference and bid you a warm welcome to Sydney.

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