BOOK REVIEW

‘Communicable Diseases and Infection Control for EMS’

by Robert G. Nixon. Brady: Prentice Hall Health: 2000.

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Reviewed by Ramon Shaban

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Literature on infection control is traditionally ground in nursing and medical practice. To date there is little in the way of research and educational materials that focuses on this in the pre-hospital emergency care setting for EMTs and paramedics. ***‘Communicable Diseases and Infection Control for EMS’*** is the first text on communicable diseases and infection control designed specifically for the pre-hospital care provider. Its aim is to provide concise information on the full spectrum of blood-borne and airborne illnesses that may be encountered on the job—and details the personal protective measures that can be taken to avoid infection.

Written by an EMT-Paramedic, this text is designed to provide paramedics with information on the myriad of infectious diseases that pose a risk in the pre-hospital field. The text is directed specifically to the US setting and was written to meet specific training requirements of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevent (CDC). It is ground entirely in American legislative contexts which are not applicable to the individuals in other countries and jurisdictions. It is however relevant to users outside of the US as some elements of the principles of infection control and the science of infectious disease management are universal.

The text consists of nine chapters which are supplemented by a glossary of terms and unique activities referred to as ‘You Make The Call’—a series of vignettes or case histories that are aimed at testing the users knowledge at the end of the relevant question. Each

chapter has objectives listed to guide the learning of the user. The text begins with a short introduction into the contextual background of the text, relating specifically to the US setting. It summarily describes the relevance of this text in terms of blood-borne pathogens and airborne diseases, specifically Tuberculosis. The chapter concludes by provides a very short overview of the microbiological basis of disease and generic signs and symptoms that should raise an index of suspicion of an infectious disease. In chapter 2 the text overviews modes of transmission of infectious diseases that leads into discussion of immune physiology in chapter 4. Chapter 4 discusses communicable disease of childhood, followed by those found in adulthood in chapter 5. Chapter 6 explores 'food-borne' infections, such as salmonella, E. coli and Clostridium botulinum. Chapter 7, titled 'Dangerous Acronyms' deals specifically HIV and AIDS, aimed at familiarizing EMS professionals with the nature of the disease, modes of transmission, risk factors, the 1993 CDC guidelines for AIDS classification, symptomology of HIV infection and personal protective measures against the virus. This is followed by an overview of infectious hepatitis in Chapter 8. The text concludes in Chapter 9 with discussion of OSHA/CDC requirements for infection control programs and explains to user what is required for reducing the chance of exposure to an infectious agent and the steps to be taken after an exposure. Specific examples relevant to EMT and paramedic practice are provided, including Universal Precautions, workplace practice controls, training programs, waste management, and post-exposure procedure. An exemplar infection control program is provides with a selection of forms relevant to the US setting.

Overall, the text meets its broad aims. Each chapter of the text is clearly set out, logical, and includes a useful glossary of terms. A comprehensive index is provided, and the use of black-and-white pictures throughout adds to the education experience. The inside aspects of the front and back covers include colour photographs of classic infectious diseases, which are an essential aspect in the clinical recognition of infectious disease. There are however notable deficiencies of this text. The most current edition is 2000, and as such the currency of some information cited is not clear. In parts the text cites research projects without reference, making it virtually impossible to follow up. The text does not include a list of references or a bibliography, and lacks epidemiological considerations of infectious disease, such as incidence and prevalence. Some material presented lacks depth and is unnecessarily simplified. Paramedics and EMTs, like all acute primary health care professionals, must have a comprehensive understanding of infectious disease and infection control. This could have been achieved in this text by including a reference list for further reading and secondary sources. The text is nevertheless a useful resource for American EMTs and paramedics. Its appeal is largely restricted to American students, given that other countries and jurisdictions follow different infection control standards.