The government must not wash its hands of this hygiene problem

Hand washing is said to be the single most important activity healthcare workers can carry out to cut down cross-infection, and hence hospital-acquired infection, within the NHS.

For effective handwashing techniques, healthcare workers need hands and wrists that are free from rings, bracelets and watches. Most hospitals have handwashing policies that describe how to cleanse hands effectively and recommend jewellery is not worn.

You also need wrists to be free from clothing. All staff in the NHS, except medical staff, have uniforms that allow this.

It is well reported that medical staff fail to wash their hands at all, let alone effectively. Clothing with long sleeves precludes an adequate technique and compounds the problem.

The UK needs to look to Europe and other countries to see how they address ‘medical’ uniform and the Department of Health needs to encourage doctors to look at this themselves. A cultural change is needed.

Infection control nurses are often asked by nurses and other healthcare workers why hospital management does not reinforce handwashing and clothing requirements with medical staff.

The answer, in truth, is that management fails to tackle the problem because it would be an onerous task. This is the challenge. But the government needs to act nationally for it to happen.

Linda Wilding
Bedford

Inspiring writing from a kindred spirit

I was very sorry to read that Professor Stephen Wright has received unpleasant correspondence (perspectives, September 12) about his series of articles and I would like to redress the balance a little.

I have very much enjoyed his writing and indeed feel I have found a kindred spirit. Several of the books he has referred to over the weeks I too have found valuable and inspiring.

The broader view of spirituality reading such works has brought me over the years has greatly enhanced my nursing, my empathy and my sense of personal responsibility.

Somehow, all this was expressed so beautifully in his articles – if they are finished I shall miss them.

For me, Professor Wright and the late Fo Ettinger represented all that was best in nursing and that which I myself aspire to.

Hazel Smith
Somerset

Readers’ responses will help us clarify skills guide

Nursing Standard has received correspondence about a recent Essential Skills guide to passing a nasogastric tube. Maggie Nicol replies on behalf of her co-authors of Essential Nursing Skills, from which the guide is taken:

Comments received about the guide are particularly useful as we are in the process of peer reviewing the book in preparation for the second edition.

We agree with comments that the auscultatory method of determining the position of a nasogastric tube is no longer common practice. The guide was intended for people caring for adults rather than children and we recognise the need to make that clearer.

We would be interested to hear other people’s views on checking the position of a microbore tube when it is not possible to aspirate any gastric contents. We would advocate the use of X-ray in this situation.

We recognise that pH paper is more reliable and has now replaced litmus paper for the purpose of checking acidity and this has been changed for the second edition of the book.

With regard to re-use of the guide wire, this was common practice when we wrote the guide, but we are checking with the Medical Devices Agency for the latest recommendations. We did not intend to imply that the tube would be re-passed, rather that the guide wire could be used again if another X-ray to check position of the tube was required.

With regard to securing the tube, we feel that the ‘trouser’ tape is specifically designed to keep the tube from pressing against the nostril to avoid pressure damage, but we agree that we have not made this sufficiently clear. We will include other methods of securing the tube in the second edition and stress the need to regularly check the nostril with all methods.

We understand the comments about the lack of references but in this format there simply is no room. In the book, the skills are accompanied by a bibliography and suggested reading and thus are evidence-based. The book was peer reviewed prior to publication and has been reviewed again prior to second edition. The reviewers have also highlighted some of the points raised by your correspondents.