Letters to the Editor

Scandinavian Experience Differs

To the Editor,

In the editorial, “Current Handwashing Issues,” in the January 1984 issue of Infection Control the author states that alcohol, though acceptable as a skin degeming agent, is too drying for constant use. This is not a Scandinavian experience.

Its acceptability as a skin degeming agent, in fact its superiority over medicated or non-medicated soaps, has been well-demonstrated by Ojajarvi who states: “Alcoholic solutions with skin caring additives are well tolerated even in frequent hand washing and their use should be encouraged.”

In Sweden 70% ethanol with 2% glycerol has been the recommended hand disinfectant in wards for more than a decade. After the studies of Ojajarvi and Rotter et al both concerning ward use and preoperative surgical scrub. Its skin acceptability has been demonstrated by Ojajarvi who states: “Alcoholic solutions with skin caring additives are well tolerated even in frequent hand washing and their use should be encouraged.”

In response to Dr. Nystrom's comments regarding the acceptability of alcohol for routine use as a hand cleansing agent, the evidence that alcohol is efficacious is unquestionable. Its availability in a form acceptable for use on clinical units is the problem in this country. The product that Dr. Nystrom describes, 70% ethanol with 2% glycerol, would minimize the problem of skin drying. To my knowledge, however, there are few such products available for general use in the US.

One product of which I am aware, Hibistat (Stuart Pharmaceuticals), is similar to the product which was tested by Dr. Ojajarvi in Finland and would seem to offer excellent antibacterial activity with minimal skin drying. There are probably other such products available for general use in the US.

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Dr. Larson was invited to respond to Dr. Nystrom’s comments.

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REFERENCES

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PPD Skin Tests for Workers

To the Editor:

In view of the rise in pulmonary tuberculosis in the Southern California area, what is the advisability of not repeating PPD skin tests on workers in the Skilled Nursing and Allied Health Care fields, who initially had negative PPD skin tests?

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