Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis was born on July 1, 1818 in Taban (Budapest) in Hungary. His well-known work was in medicine in 1844 with specialization in midwifery. He learned diagnostic and statistical methods and took surgical training before taking a post as assistant in the Vienna General Hospital. His antiseptic methods proved to be fruitful here as well. In 1861, he eventually published a book in German about his significant discovery followed by a series of letters written in reaction to his critics.

Semmelweis discovered that puerperal sepsis (a type of septicaemia) commonly known as childbed fever in new mothers could be prevented if doctors washed their hands. Based on his analysis, he established a simple but revolutionary prophylaxis system in 1847. He believed that microbes causing infection were readily transferred from patients to patients, thus, Semmelweis suggested the use of chlorinated lime solution for handwashing to prevent the infectious disease from spreading. For this successful yet such simple and cost effective method, he is rightfully considered to be the savior of mothers.

Ignoring his findings, Semmelweis' colleagues and other medical professionals refused to accept his findings mainly because they did not find it convincing that they could be responsible for spreading infections. The reaction reflected on his job as well when he was moved to the second clinic operated by midwives because they were not involved with autopsies or surgery. The common practice of hand washing nowadays was once considered odd during the 19th century. Moreover, the diseases like malaria and typhoid were associated with the contact with water. But thanks largely to Philipp Semmelweis who discovered the etiology and prevention of puerperal fever we now know that microbes can be transferred from cadavers to patients which literally removed puerperal fever from the hospital. This was the beginning of an antiseptic era.

Although hugely successful; Semmelweis' discovery directly confronted with the beliefs of his time. His colleagues and other medical professionals refused to go publically but some of his students and colleagues wrote letters and delivered lectures explaining his work. But later, he somehow got convinced and during 1850, he delivered a few public lectures. But his colleagues and his patients were not convinced and his work was subjected to ridicule. He insisted upon the use of chlorinated lime solutions for handwashing by medical students and medical staff to patients and vice versa.

On the contrary, large number of women died during childbirth due to puerperal sepsis or the childbed fever. Childbed fever was largely caused by the lack of indoor plumbing and hygiene facilities in hospitals. But thanks largely to Philipp Semmelweis who discovered the etiology and prevention of puerperal fever we now know that microbes can be transferred from cadavers to patients which literally removed puerperal fever from the hospital. This was the beginning of an antiseptic era.

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