

(3) Douching does not lessen the dangers accruing from the presence of bacteria in the vagina. This is probably the most difficult contention to prove definitely. Do destructive organisms ever exist in the vagina after labor? Undoubtedly, yes. In some cases cocci of various kinds are present in varying numbers. The recent investigations of Doederlein, Winter, Steffek, Koenig, and others, confirm the opinions of former observers as to the occasional, if not frequent, presence of pathogenic micrococci in the vaginal secretions after labor. It is generally agreed, however, that in normal cases the vaginal mucus is strongly acid. The acidity is produced by innoxious organisms which have their habitat in the healthy vagina. It happens that these organisms have some restraining, if not destructive, effect on the pathogenic cocci. Vaginal antiseptic injections may interfere with this normal acidity, and thus chemically lessen the resistance of the tissues to bacteria. Taking these views as correct, we learn that nature has provided a secretion in the vagina which prevents the wicked organisms from doing any harm; and such being the case, douching is at least useless.

(4) Douching is actually dangerous. I have already alluded to certain of these dangers, especially from a surgical standpoint. It is apt to disturb clots, and thus open avenues for infection; to open lacerations of the cervix and vagina, and thus prevent them from healing; to wash bacteria into the uterine cavity, and thus cause septic endometritis. Among other dangers which are generally due to accident or carelessness are the introduction of septic matter by fingers and instruments. Some mention other rare or minor dangers which I will not refer to in this paper.

Many of the arguments thus far advanced are, to a certain extent, theoretical; and in connection therewith the results of clinical experience ought to assist us materially in arriving at correct conclusions. Fortunately, statistics prove beyond the possibility of doubt that the results of our modern methods, whether with or without douching, are vastly better than those of the pre-antiseptic era. The fearful mortality rates of five to ten per cent., or even more, have been reduced to about one-half of one per cent., or less, in all our well-ordered maternity hospitals, both in the old and the new world. As far as I can learn, the weight of evidence goes to show that the hospitals in which the routine douching is not practised have better results. Baruch, of New York, published a table, from which it appeared that in the following hospitals where the douche was in use—Charité, Parma Maternity, and Glasgow Maternity—the mortality ranged from 1.5 to 3.42 per cent., while in the Tarnier Maternity, Paris, Prague Maternity, Copenhagen Maternity, and New York Maternity, where the douche was not in use as routine practice, the mortality ranged from 0 to .56 per cent. (*New York Medical Journal*, March 22, 1894.)