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Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology

Volume 36, No 4

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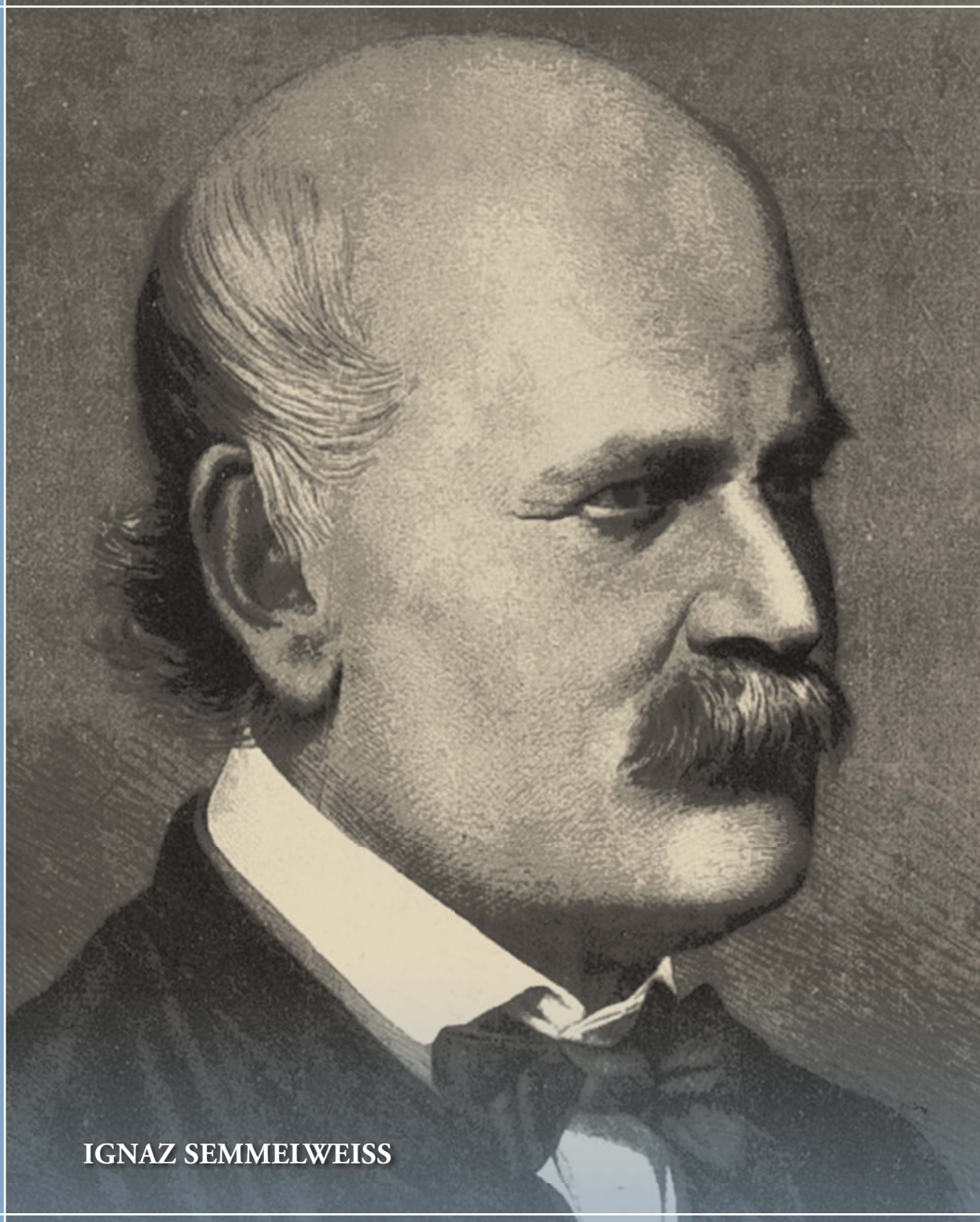

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Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology

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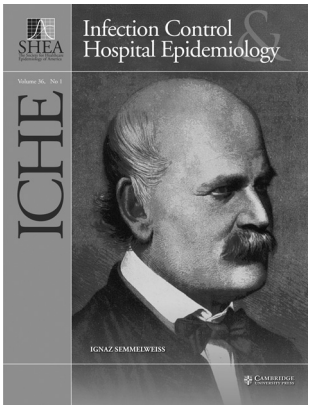

Starting in 2015, the cover format of each volume of Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology will highlight one of the many professionals throughout history who not only recognized how disease might be spread, but also how epidemiological principles could be applied to reduce healthcare associated infections.

Ignaz Semmelweiss (1818-1865) was a Hungarian physician who was appointed an assistant in obstetrics at the Allgemeines Krankenhaus in Vienna. He recognized that women delivered by midwife trainees were significantly less likely to die of puerperal fever than those delivered by physicians or medical students. He hypothesized that puerperal fever could be spread to mothers at the time of delivery by the hands of obstetricians that became contaminated while performing autopsies on women who had died in the maternity ward. Controlled trials of hand washing with chloride of lime solution and disinfection of instruments showed that he could reduce infections among the women cared for by physicians by almost 20-fold. Unfortunately, he did not publish his findings which contributed to the lack of acceptance of antisepsis among senior staff; Semmelweiss' academic appointment was not renewed. He left for Budapest, but his beliefs failed to gain traction among colleagues in Hungary. Semmelweiss' increasingly erratic and angry behavior led to commitment to an asylum; he died there within a few short weeks at the age of 47 years. Contrary to legend, Semmelweiss' autopsy suggests that he did not die of streptococcal gangrene, but rather of trauma related to beatings inflicted by the guards at the asylum and an early Alzheimer-type dementia.

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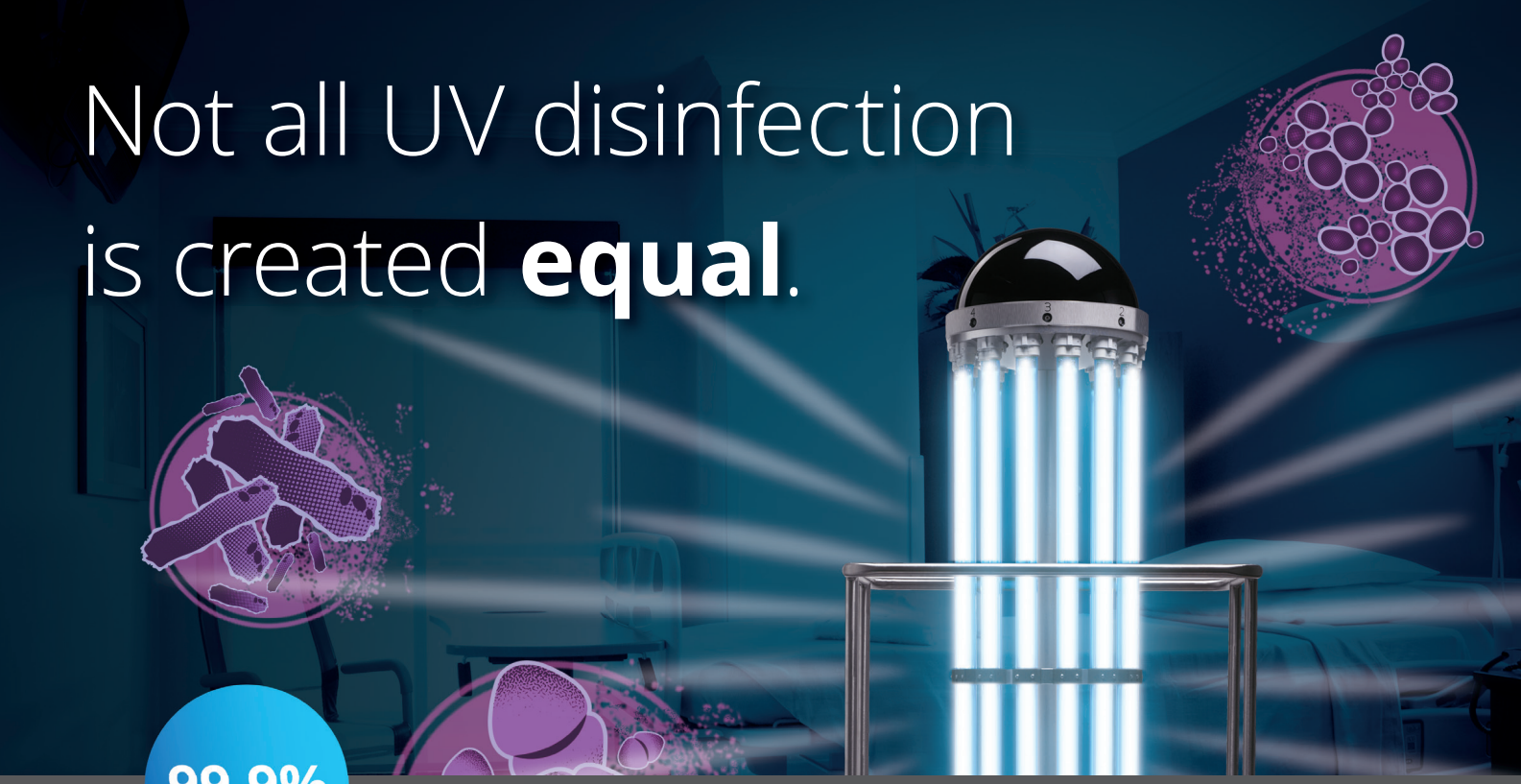

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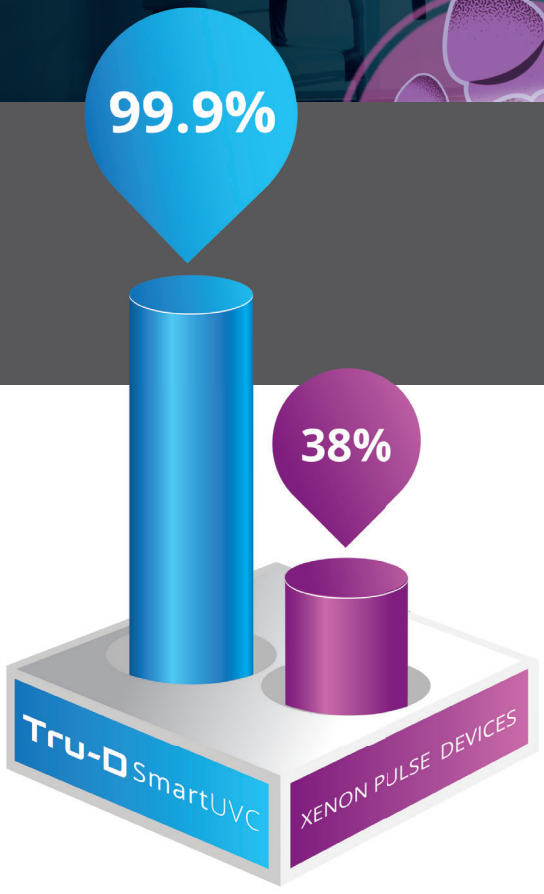

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