

# Black Death of Childbirth

**Sometimes “YOU” are the problem. So step aside.** Simon Sinek

This is the story of a man whose ideas could have saved a lot of lives and spared countless numbers of women and infants' feverish and agonizing deaths.

You'll notice I said "could have."

The year was 1846, and our would-be hero was a Hungarian doctor named Ignaz Semmelweis. Semmelweis was a man of his time, according to Justin Lessler, an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.

It was a time Lessler describes as "the start of the golden age of the physician scientist," when physicians were expected to have scientific training.

So doctors like Semmelweis were no longer thinking of illness as an imbalance caused by bad air or evil spirits. They looked instead to anatomy. Autopsies became more common, and doctors got interested in numbers and collecting data.

The young Dr. Semmelweis was no exception. When he showed up for his new job in the maternity clinic at the General Hospital in Vienna, he started collecting some data of his own. Semmelweis wanted to figure out why so many women in maternity wards were dying from fever — commonly known as childbed fever.

He studied two maternity wards in the hospital. One was staffed by all male doctors and medical students, and the other was staffed by female midwives. And he counted the number of deaths on each ward.

When Semmelweis crunched the numbers, he discovered that women in the clinic staffed by doctors and medical students died at a rate nearly five times higher than women in the midwives' clinic.

**And the question was “why”?**

Semmelweis was intrepid enough to ask, but nobody knew the answer. Once he saw a throng of doctors so he accosted the doctors and asked his question. All he got was some reticent and irate doctors looking angry at him. Unfortunately he was hapless enough to be ignored by his fellow colleagues, due to the fact that Semmelweis was a newcomer. Under the pretext of being late or going through something dramatically important, almost everybody refused to speak to him. He felt desperate. He was adroit at collecting numbers and information so he started to find out. Why do more women die in the clinic? In other words, why was the traditional way of giving birth way safer than the modern way?

<b>Spare</b> to avoid something	<b>Feverish</b> suffering from fever	<b>Agonizing</b> causing extreme physical or mental pain	<b>Hungarian</b> belonging to or relating to Hungary a country in Europe
<b>Pretext</b> a pretended reason for doing something that is used to hide the real reason	<b>Dramatically</b> suddenly or obviously	<b>Desperate</b> very bad  feeling that you have no hope and are ready to do anything to change the bad situation you are in	<b>Adroit</b> very skilful and quick in the way you think or move
<b>Physician</b>  a medical doctor, especially one who has general skill and is not a surgeon	<b>Imbalance</b>  things that should be equal or that are normally equal are not:	<b>Anatomy</b>  the scientific study of the body and how its parts are arranged	<b>Autopsy</b>  the cutting open and examination of a dead body in order to discover the cause of death
<b>maternity clinic</b>  A <b>maternity</b> hospital specializes in caring for women during pregnancy and childbirth.	<b>figure out</b>  to understand	<b>maternity ward</b>  a separate room in a hospital in a hospital allocated for the treatment and care of women and babies during pregnancy and childbirth.	<b>fever</b>  a medical condition in which the body temperature is higher than usual and the heart beats very fast
<b>midwife</b>  a person, typically a woman, who is trained to assist women in childbirth.	<b>Crunched</b>  process	<b>Intrepid</b>  extremely brave and showing no fear of dangerous situations	<b>Throng</b>  a crowd or large group of people
<b>Accosted</b>  to go up to someone in a threatening way	<b>Reticent</b>  unwilling to speak about your thoughts or feelings	<b>Irate</b>  very angry	<b>hapless</b>  unlucky and usually unhappy