**How to…. Discuss with the microbiologist**

Antibiotics – much loved, but little understood. Much like calling something ‘ironic’, used perhaps too much and by people who may not be clear exactly when its best used. This is where the microbiologist comes in, font of knowledge and guardian of those rare and weird antibiotics you can barely pronounce, let alone prescribe appropriately.

Delving into the world of microbiology can be daunting at first, However, fear not brave junior doctor! Follow our 3(ish) step guide to streamline those discussions and get the most out of your friendly neighbourhood microbiologist.

**Step 1: The present**

The key here is surrounding yourself with up to date information – patient notes, kardex and obs chart are essential. Be expected to be asked about the following:

* **Introduce yourself**! Microbiologists often cover multiple hospitals out of hours, so names, grades, speciality and hospital can really help. While you’re at it, ensure you have their name as well for your records, the unnamed ‘microbiologist on call’ isn’t all that helpful.
* **The clinical picture**. Not just what your working diagnosis is, but also how the patient looks clinically, which means you do actually need to review them. “Treat the patient, not the blood results” is a phrase we’ve heard a lot from microbiologists, and it holds true – a slight increase of CRP is a lot less concerning if the patient is now alert and smiling at you from the end of the bed.
* **Obs**, particularly temperature spikes
* **Current antibiotics**, mode of delivery and duration.
* **Current and pending test results**. The microbiologist may have access to preliminary reports, and by showing you’ve requested the basic tests goes some way to show you are at least competent.

**Step 2: The past**

Background information is key, and a little preparation can go a long way. Have at least a glance through some old results and notes, so you are aware of the following information:

* **Previous antibiotics courses**
* **Allergies**
* **Previous cultures results**

**Step 3: The future**

This is the big question, **what do you want from the microbiologist**?. Being up front and honest with other specialities is key, and helps streamline the process. No question is worse than not having a question at all.

**Step 4: Everything in between**

Here are a few other general tips to make sure you get the most from your discussion, that didn’t necessarily fit in with our super trendy 3 stage structure.

* If you honestly don’t know the answer to a question or forgot to do a basic test, just say so. Microbiologists can smell bullshit from the other end of a phone; **be honest** but always say you will go and find out
* Try and **have as much information to hand as possible** – it makes the above situation so much easier if you have the electronic results open in front of you.
* Always **review trust guidelines** first, they are a microbiology FAQ for your trust. Answering a question that is printed in black and white on trust guidelines in a microbiologist’s pet peeve.
* When presenting all the information you’ve gathered to the microbiologist **stick to the SBARR format** – its succinct and most clinicians are familiar with it.
* Ensure you’ve done a **basic septic screen** and have up to date bloods before asking for advice
* Finally, **document your discussion clearly**.