

DENISE MURPHY

Awakening the Team

How Infection Control Practitioners Prevent Infections by Mobilizing Organizational Change

INTRODUCTION: At an Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Denise Murphy, vice president for safety and quality at Barnes-Jewish Hospital at Washington University Medical Center in St. Louis and immediate past president of APIC, shared insights about APIC and its efforts regarding International Infection Prevention Week. In this podcast, she discusses the role infection control practitioners (also known as ICPs) play in the fight against healthcare-associated infections.

INTERVIEWER: You said earlier today that you have been a member for 26 years, correct?

MURPHY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me a little bit about how, over those years, ICPs have really helped us get to where we are today?

MURPHY: ICPs today are just incredible physicians and nurses; people with master's and doctoral degrees, people from public health that can move in and out of any type of setting where patient care is delivered—statisticians, analysts. It has just been incredible to watch the field broaden and grow.

I think infection prevention and control has been seen as a solo art; one person in the hospital owns it. Somebody calls and says, "I want to talk to who's responsible for infection control," and it goes right to the office of a single person that is trying to figure out how to mobilize an organization.

I think the changes that I have seen in the last 10 years that have been really incredible, and I have been very proud to have been part of, is awakening the rest of the healthcare team—the clinicians, the healthcare executives, the nurses, and therapists, and technicians at the front line—who really do own infection prevention, because they own the patient care process. So there are the people that put their hands on patients and those of us who support those people. So infection control is getting closer and closer to the front line.

For the last few years we have been talking much more about prevention. We don't want to control things after they happen and they have harmed a patient and their family. Instead, we really want to focus on the evidence-based medicine, and the many, many years of research that have shown that if you do these things you will prevent infections.

So our challenge is to look at infection prevention as a system. A system where we need to build in reliability, and redundancy, and all of the things that make it easy for people to do the right thing, almost without thinking about it, and really hard to do the wrong thing.

INTERVIEWER: Now, the title for today's event was "Getting to Zero." Do you think you are going to see that here soon?

MURPHY: Oh, I see it already. One of the things I did to celebrate Infection Prevention Week yesterday, and I really took a risk, and it was just one of those spontaneous moments where I thought before I hit "send": How much trouble could I get in for doing this? But I sent a message out to everyone from our hospital president and our board chair, through the VPs, directors, and managers, asking them to think about getting to zero as a real commitment from all of them ... not just the infection prevention team.

We have eight ICUs in this large academic medical center that's in the top 10 that have had almost no VAP [ventilator-associated pneumonia] over the past two years. We've had one bypass infection in about 28 months. We've had no surgical-site infections after laminectomies. Several of our ICUs, our cardiac thoracic ICU: no BSIs [bloodstream infections].

We have now a competition between the units and the services—everyone is working to get to zero. So do I think we can get there? I know we can. I have seen it. I have been part of it, and as APIC president this year, I have been so honored to travel all over the world and talk to infection prevention control professionals in many countries, including underdeveloped countries, where they have shown me infection reductions that even to them are unbelievable.