

VICTORIA NAHUM

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## **Quest for Safety: One Family's Story Fuels the Fight to Eradicate Healthcare-associated Infections**

Victoria Nahum, with her husband, Armando, cofounded the Safe Care Campaign in 2006 after three members of their family, in three different hospitals in three different states, suffered from healthcare-acquired infections (HAIs) within one year's time. One of those family members was Armando's 27-year-old son, Josh—Victoria's stepson. In October of 2006, Josh died of his infection.

At the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology's (APIC) press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Nahum talked with Laura Miller of Knowledge Is Infectious about her personal experience with HAIs—and how the Safe Care Campaign is arming consumers with new tools to fight them. For more information about the Safe Care Campaign, log on to [www.safecarecampaign.org](http://www.safecarecampaign.org).

**INTERVIEWER:** I'm sure a lot of people have told you this, but your story was compelling and heart-wrenching. Can you tell me a little bit about how your personal experience led to the Safe Care Campaign?

**NAHUM:** Sure. As you know, three members of our family were impacted by HAIs during a 10-month period from the end of 2005 to the end of 2006. That culminated in the death of our son, Josh, who died of his third infection in just a few weeks, receiving care in a hospital in Colorado. So when Josh died, obviously we were grief-stricken, and our family had been hard hit so many times in a short period of time, you kind of sit back and look at your life, and you say: This is not a good year for our family.

But at the end of it all, when Josh finally died of his infection, it dawned on me that it wasn't three bad things that had happened to us that were separate; they were all really related. They were all HAIs.

**INTERVIEWER:** In about a year you've accomplished quite a bit with your campaign. Can you tell me a little bit about Safe Care, and how you're trying to arm consumers with the tools that they need to help in fighting HAIs?

NAHUM: Sure. One of the things that I really was disappointed in was, when I was trying to find information, I could find no information. I found a little bit on the CDC site, and that was really helpful, and I would find a smidgen here, and I would bookmark it and I'd do a printout and I was just trying to find out everything that I could about these infections while Josh was ill. It was so few and far between that I was very concerned about that, and considering that it was really three for three—I mean, three different hospitals, three different states. It wasn't that it was a Nahum thing, something in our genetics, and it wasn't that it was the same hospital and the one hospital was having a problem, and it wasn't that it was about ... we never wanted to make it about the hospital. Because it wasn't about the hospital; it was about the problem, and the problem was widespread, and it was more than that.

So, all of a sudden I felt a fear of, "Well, if this can happen to our family three times in a year, how much more so can this happen to all Americans all over the country?" I didn't want that to happen to other people. I didn't want other people to go through the pain of a staph infection.

Our son, when he first got sick, when he first broke his femur and fractured his skull, my husband was beside himself. I remember hugging him and saying, "I promise nothing bad will happen with Josh. I promise." As it turned out, I wasn't a good promiser. So I didn't want that to happen to anybody ever again.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think patients can be empowered to help the healthcare system get to zero?

NAHUM: Yes, I do. I just want to say this: I think the healthcare system tries as hard as they can. Nobody goes to work wanting something bad to happen.

I don't think anyone wanted things to turn out badly. Yeah, did I experience anger? Yeah. The first week after he died, I had so many different kinds of feelings that they all made sense, and none of them made sense. But you know, I wasn't ever angry at the healthcare workers. I never believed it was their fault. I believed that there was something afoot, and whatever it was that they were trying to do did not succeed, and I wanted to know why so that I could help them have it not happen to someone else.