

# The Role of the Infection Preventionist

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Basics of Infection Prevention  
Healthcare-Associated Infections Program  
Center for Health Care Quality  
California Department of Public Health



# Objectives

- Describe the role of infection preventionists (IP) in health care
- Discuss relationships important to success in performing the IP roles

## Unique Role of the IP

“There are two pieces that are unique to what IPs and healthcare epidemiologists bring to the table: Data --- knowing what is happening in your institution --- and the knowledge of what needs to be done to prevent infections. Those are the reasons people will invite you when discussing problems related to healthcare safety --- because its something the others don't know. It's what gives us the power.”

Denise Cardo, MD, Director  
CDC's Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion

# What is the Role of the IP?

**What is the Role of the IP?**

**PREVENTION!**

# Historical Perspective

## What we did

- IP typically
  - Reviewed CDC guidelines on HAI prevention
  - Educated staff, mainly nursing, on the guidelines
  - Performed HAI surveillance
  - Reported findings to Infection Control and Executive Committees
  - Reported “successes” to The Joint Commission

# Historical Perspective

## And What Happened

- Many thousands of patients developed HAI
- Many HAI were device-associated
- Hospital policies and procedures did not reflect actual clinical practices

## Current Perspective on HAI Prevention

- HAI harm patients
- Most HAI can be prevented
- Consumers aware of HAI impact
- Demand for accountability by regulatory agencies, advocacy groups, and legislative mandates
- Infection PREVENTION has become a **clear mandate**

**It takes a  
the entire health care team  
to prevent HAI**



# IP Roles and Tools for HAI Prevention



## Professional Standards for IP

- Professional accountability
  - Acquire and maintain knowledge and skills
    - Attend educational conferences
    - Join professional organizations (e.g., APIC, SHEA)
- Qualifications for hospital-based IP
  - Baccalaureate in nursing, microbiology, or epidemiology preferred
  - Basic training (e.g., IP fundamentals course)
  - Knowledge, experience, willingness to work hard, listen, and question

## IP as Evaluator

- Review annual risk assessment
  - Update Infection prevention plan
  - Participate in unit rounding
    - Nursing units, OR, GI lab, radiology, ED, clinics
  - Perform surveillance
  - Evaluate staff adherence to HAI prevention care practices
    - Organize data collection to understand what is actually going on
  - Investigate suspected outbreaks
  - Educate based on prevention needs and problems
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## IP as HAI Prevention Expert

- Analyze, interpret, and feedback surveillance data
  - Know current evidence-based (CDC) HAI prevention practices
  - Regularly review HAI surveillance findings with healthcare providers and leadership
    - Identify areas for prevention focus
    - Spur new prevention efforts
    - Measure HAI prevention progress over time
    - Provide encouragement to continue efforts when prevention success occurs or stalls
    - Look for new ways to attain and sustain prevention
  - Feedback data to improve performance
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## IP as Consultant and Influencer

- Construction
- Device selection
- Floods, fires
- Family/visitor Issues
- Dietary, EVS, lab
- Pet therapy
- Pandemic
- And more

Influence: the capacity or power of persons or things to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behavior, opinions, etc., of others

**The IP has influence –  
use it to keep patients, staff, and visitors safe**

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## IP as Educator

- Educate all health care provider groups
  - Evidence-based infection prevention practices
  - Infection risk, prevention, and control methods
    - Updates on Influenza, vaccine preventable diseases, emerging infections
    - Annual Bloodborne Pathogens and Aerosolized Transmissible Diseases (ATD) classes
- Ensure visitors educated
- Offer community-based classes
  - The public likes to hear what IP have to say

## IP as Collaborator

- It is ALL about relationships – with your EVS Director, OR Supervisor, Chief Engineer, Marketing staff, Materials Management, Lab Director
  - What can you learn from other's expertise?
  - Where is teamwork a part the solving a problem?
  - Respect and acknowledgment go both ways
- IP collaborate during disasters, outbreaks, community projects – get to know people now!

## IP as Liaison

- IP serve as link to:
  - Local public health
    - For connecting to local services, resources
  - CDC and NHSN
    - For prevention guidelines and surveillance protocols
  - Regulators
    - For requirements specific to infection prevention
  - Patients, visitors, staff, and administration
- IPs serve as an advocate for patient safety



# IP as Customer Service

Who are infection prevention customers?

- Patients
- Staff
- Physicians
- Visitors
- Community
- Public health
- Anyone who calls for your consultation services

## IP as Mentor and Leader

- Staff watch your behaviors
- You make decisions related to ethics and regulations
- You are responsible for IP policies and procedures
- IP should identify needs/desire for mentorship
  - Staff nurses interested in infection prevention
  - Students needing a preceptor
  - An IP Liaison team

# Questions?

For more information,  
please contact any  
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Or email

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