Evolving education for infection prevention and control professionals

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Appropriate and ongoing infection prevention and control (IPAC) education is essential to the success of every IPAC professional (ICP). IPAC education can come in the form of formal, structured education delivered by academic institutions and professional organizations, in the form of non-formal workshops or short courses delivered by subject-matter experts, or informally, such as through self-directed readings and co-worker mentoring. All of these can play an important role in the development of a competent and skilled ICP. Given that the field of IPAC is constantly changing based on the emergence of new infectious diseases, changing best-practice recommendations, new technologies, and challenges facing healthcare systems, ICPs must continuously learn and adapt to stay current and effective.

For many years, IPAC Canada has provided a list of endorsed basic IPAC courses to help novice ICPs in the selection of high-quality courses which will provide knowledge and skills to those interested or who are new to the field (IPAC Canada, 2022). These courses must meet established criteria for endorsement, which includes standards for content, length, evaluations and updates, instructor qualifications, and delivery methods. There are currently four endorsed courses and a sponsored course offered through IPAC Canada which undergoes the same review process to ensure it meets the criteria for endorsement. In addition to IPAC Canada courses, there are some great non-formal opportunities as well. Conferences, such as the IPAC Canada National Education Conference (IPAC Canada, 2022), provide great learning opportunities for novice and experienced IPCs to advance their knowledge, learn from subject-matter experts, and share their experiences with colleagues across the country and beyond. Such opportunities offer short-term learning options if there are barriers to enrolling in a formal education course, but all forms of learning opportunities are important as they complement each other, and can fill specific learning needs (Manuti et al., 2014).

Over the last couple of years, there have been new and exciting IPAC educational programs developed, including courses that are practicum-based, or focused on non-acute IPAC practices, and even the development of an IPAC track for a graduate-level public health program in Ontario. The development of new and/or more advanced options for IPAC education is exciting and will provide opportunities to build broader knowledge and skills, achieve a higher proficiency, and support the development of leaders in the field. The creation of more advanced IPAC programs could open up opportunities for development of ICPs with advanced cross-training in fields that can strengthen IPAC practices such as education, social sciences, technology, and One Health, to name a few. IPAC research-based graduate-level degrees could contribute new knowledge to the field by exploring the effectiveness of IPAC interventions and to help better understand the challenges and barriers facing healthcare systems.

The possibilities for IPAC education are limitless and hopefully will continue to include many more high-quality programs and courses focused on the growing number of non-acute sectors which require IPAC support. The knowledge base of IPCs will continue to advance and be strengthened through the development of more opportunities for advanced and research-based education.

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