

Gratitude for the Infection Prevention and Control Community

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As the world enters the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been unprecedented stress and burnout among healthcare workers and infection prevention and control professionals (ICPs) are no exception. ICPs have had a unique role throughout the pandemic in working to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2 (the causative agent of COVID-19) through a variety of initiatives and strategies. These include policy and procedure development to guide infection prevention and control (IPAC) practices, conducting risk analyses, staff education and training, investigating and managing outbreaks, and determining how to implement guidance, recommendations and directives in diverse settings, while trying to understand the quickly evolving landscape of COVID-19. ICPs have experienced upheaval as roles changed to quickly respond to the evolving needs within the healthcare sector, and have served as role models to promote the goals of the IPAC program. All in all, ICPs have to be knowledgeable, confident and reassuring even when the evidence is lacking as they are faced with such a new and constantly changing adversary.

Many ICPs have experienced long and challenging days over the past two years, and due to the demands of the profession, it can be a real challenge to disconnect at the end of a workday. ICPs have had to serve as sources of information to friends and families, and may feel a duty to offer support and advice when asked, or when the opportunity presents itself. Nevertheless, the extended length of the pandemic has left ICPs feeling exhausted and burned out.

Through IPAC Canada chapters, committees and conferences, ICPs can connect with colleagues – both locally and across Canada – to find support and to provide advice. Now, more than ever, ICPs are relying on the IPAC community. From within this community, ICPs can find colleagues who can offer advice, validate our struggles, share in their challenges and celebrate successes. They can understand these experiences better than even closest family and friends can.

In order to continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be prudent for all ICPs to focus on their own well-being, taking deserved vacation when

possible, managing stress and prioritizing the establishment or strengthening of positive relationships with colleagues to build up the much-needed community of support. Participation in professional community groups has been recognized and recommended as a strategy to support healthcare worker resilience and wellness [1,2]. These communities can be formed with current and former co-workers, and with connections made through IPAC Canada chapters or committees. Another option is to form an IPAC Community of Practice. Communities of Practice are groups of individuals with similar professional interests who can engage in the process of collective learning [3, 4]. They could be used by ICPs to share strategies for coping, building resilience and maintaining a collective well-being. ICPs from local organizations could connect to share their stories, experiences, tools, resources and insights, providing a forum for validation and support. Sharing of knowledge, experiences and skills could benefit others, both professionally and personally, and the opportunities for building new connections could be beneficial beyond the pandemic.

I'm incredibly grateful to the IPAC community for the outstanding work I've witnessed throughout the pandemic. I've been so inspired by the dedication, integrity and even creativity in the approaches to supporting the implementation of IPAC best practices. I'm also grateful to the *Canadian Journal of Infection Control (CJIC)* Editorial Board, which has managed to continue to provide high-quality reviews of manuscripts while balancing heavy workloads and professional and personal commitments. This process is crucial in maintaining our standard of publishing only research that is of high scientific quality, and is critical to the operation of *CJIC* as well as our overarching goal of keeping ICPs informed on new scientific evidence that is relevant to the practice of IPAC. I'm especially grateful to all of the healthcare workers who have maintained our healthcare systems under such challenging circumstances. As we persist in our work through every new challenge the pandemic has in store for us, we must continue to encourage, support and lift each other in order to build and maintain the resiliency and well-being of our IPAC community.

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