IPS: working towards an infection-free future through education and collaboration

The Infection Prevention Society (IPS), based in the United Kingdom and Ireland, but working internationally, pushes for a future where no one is harmed by a preventable infection. With its origins in nursing, the society now boasts a membership in the thousands made up of healthcare workers, associate members not working directly in healthcare, and organisations as corporate members. Through educational events and the Journal of Infection Prevention, the society aims to provide expert and evidence-based advice for professionals, the general public and regulators.

As the current President of the Infection Prevention Society (IPS), Neil Wigglesworth leads a society focused on getting to the root of infection issues in healthcare. Intent on ‘preventing not curing’, the society’s vision to influence not just healthcare workers but governmental bodies and the wider international community puts this organisation at the forefront of tackling infections such as MRSA, Norovirus, Clostridium difficile and Candida auris.

Research Features spoke with Neil to find out where it all began, the society’s educational programme and its wide range of collaborations, as well as some of its latest research projects on an ideal infection prevention service and the safe management of urinary catheters.

How would you define your role as President of the Infection Prevention Society (IPS)?

The President can be viewed as a figurehead and public face for the society, but we work as a collaboration. I work with a board of directors because the IPS is a charity as well as a company. The board has a range of people with a range of talents and we are all there to make real our vision, that no person is harmed by a preventable infection. So, although I take a leadership role, it is very collaborative.

How has your experience as a nurse and at Public Health Wales helped you in your current role now?

I have about 20 years of infection prevention and control experience in several roles. Infection prevention control is my world. I understand the issues that all our members face and what they must do to protect patients every day. Our members are on the front line protecting patients and my role is to make sure the society supports them.

Can you briefly summarise the society’s background and heritage, and perhaps give some examples of the important research it has been involved in over the years?

It is the IPS’ tenth anniversary this year, but we have a longer history than that. Prior to those ten years, we were known as the Infection Control Nurses Association (ICNA), and we have been around for some 40 years. We started up primarily as a nursing organisation but we have spread to include wider healthcare professionals and other interested parties. We are a member organisation and have always existed to support our members in doing their job as infection control practitioners. Our primary focus and charitable objects have always been education so we focus on producing educational events and materials.

We have developed research competency over the years and have been involved...
In many projects, such as the Whose Is Norovirus Control Lost (WINCL) Project. We also produce comparabilities that infection prevention and control practitioners should either have or be working towards and a bimonthly journal which publishes the latest research and other material.

IPS organises several events throughout the year, including International Infection Prevention Week during October. What difference do events such as this have on educating people?

I think the public, certainly in the United Kingdom, have become increasingly aware of the issues around infection prevention. During the last ten years, there have been issues such as MRSA and Clostridium difficile, and more recently the ‘Japanese Fungus’, Candida auris, which have struck a chord with the public and politicians. At International Infection Prevention Week, we take the opportunity to reach out and try to spread the message about what infection prevention is and how everyone can contribute. We have done a lot of work on social media in the last few years. Last year during the week we had several million Twitter impressions.

IPS’ annual conference is coming up in September. Could you tell me some more about this and what it involves?

It is a three-day conference and it has something for everyone. We have internationally famous speakers and some one-day conferences running at the same time; one on dentistry, infection prevention and control in care homes and at home and a new one on infection prevention and control in estates and facilities. We have international engagement sessions, for example, someone speaking about infection control in a children’s hospital in Cambodia. I cannot overstate how excited we are about this year’s tenth-anniversary conference.

Are there any personal achievements you have had since your appointment in President in September last year that you’re particularly proud of?

From a personal perspective, the thing that I have been looking at the most is working with our communications company to raise the profile and increase the influence of the society. When we asked our members what they want from the society, the word that comes up over and over again, is influence. They want the society to influence regulators and government departments so that the voice of infection prevention and control comes up over and over again, is influence. They want the society to influence regulators and governmental bodies.

It is relatively simple. One of the things that has changed in infection prevention and control is the importance of the word ‘prevention’. Preventing infections is better than finding a cure and we felt our name should reflect that. The second thing was that although we did start off primarily as a nursing organisation, we wanted to reach out to the rest of the healthcare community.

What kind of impact has IPS’ work had on implementing policy and decisions relating to preventing infections?

We have always been involved in every iteration of the MRSA guidance in the United Kingdom. We have also been involved in the Departments of Health’s guidance on endoscopy; producing all the tools and guidance documents to support that process. We work collaboratively, for example, the Royal College of Nursing at times and we have worked with commercial organisations to produce and disseminate guidance. I think we have a good impact and we would like to do more.

Where do you see IPS’ future going and for any of our interested readers, how can they get involved with you and your society?

As a society, we are growing, broadening our base and engaging with a wider group of staff within healthcare, but also the public. We recently established an international engagement group as part of our structure, and they are looking both to attract people internationally to our society to talk with us, but also to support our members who work in, for example, resource-limited countries. We are developing our relationships with industry, regulators and governmental bodies.

If people want to get involved, we will be delighted to welcome them and anyone can join our society. We have a membership structure that allows for associate members who do not work in the specialty and companies to join as corporate members. Come and engage with us at our educational events! Many of the local educational events run by our branches are free and are listed on our website. Just get involved with our vision!

- For more information, please visit the IPS website at http://www.ips-uk.net/
- Follow IPS on twitter at @IPS_Infection

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