

President's Message



It was a great honour for me to be elected to succeed Alison Pyper as president of this rapidly developing organisation and it is my aim during my term of office to further the progress she initiated.

Alison, with her dynamic personality and effervescent enthusiasm earned an enormous amount of recognition and respect for the Association following the conference in Alice Springs and fortunately is still on the Executive to give advice and assistance. With the complexities of the tasks we face, having colleagues to share problems and responsibilities is very valuable as I am sure you are all aware.

One person who is no longer on the Executive and to whom we owe enormous gratitude is Elaine Graham. Elaine, from Woden Valley Hospital in Canberra has been a member of AICA Executive continuously since its conception in 1985 and with her vast knowledge and experience has been invaluable and not only because she was in the position to "lobby" people in the capital and serve on many Standards Australia Committees. We will miss Elaine for her wisdom and counselling and look forward to seeing her on other occasions.

On your behalf, I thank these two people and hope they enjoy the reduction in their work load, if there ever is such a thing in the world of Infection Control.

The patterns of disease throughout the world are changing, so we too must be prepared to change policies and strategies to meet these changes. To do this we need to keep our own knowledge current, spending time gaining new information and sharing it with our colleagues. It is important I believe that our employers appreciate our need to learn and grant time for that professional self development.

The Annual National Conferences provide one valuable forum for such development and we congratulate the small group in the Australian Capital Territory for the excellent conference they organised in May this year. Professors Cossart and McDonald and Dr Peter Collignon, well recognised experts in Infection Control, gave insights and directions for the future, whilst our

colleagues shared some of their successes and frustrations. As with all conferences, the networking during the breaks was used to its greatest advantage.

The problems associated with Clinical Indicators and the surveillance that has become a large part of our daily lives was outlined in a very successful session at the conference. It was clear from the papers presented that there are problems with the criteria set by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards and if hospitals are to compare infection rates a new tool is urgently required. A round table discussion on Standardised Surveillance of Nosocomial Infection is to take place in Canberra on Tuesday 26th September. The initiative organised by Dr Peter Taylor and chaired by Dr Peter Collignon will have as AICA representatives, Susan Resnik and Cathryn Murphy from NSW and Elaine Graham from the ACT. Discussed will be practical issues such as what data will be collected and by whom. Who will train the data collectors, own and store such information. We feel very strongly that such surveillance is the province of Infection Control. Data should be collected, owned, analysed and fed back by Infection Control and if necessary AICA will assist with the organisation of education sessions in each state to ensure uniformity of data collection.

With all this professional progress it comes as a surprise to learn that the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards in the draft "Charter for Change" has seen fit to categorise Infection Control once more under the environmental section.

The Executive, with your support will lobby hard to overturn this decision as well as offer a clearer definition of the function of this key specialty.

Change is ever present as we are only too aware. In the June edition of Australian Infection Control, Alison Pyper in her Presidential message addressed the issues associated with misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the concept of Universal Precautions. Every day there is evidence to this fact, either in the workplace or in the media. The Centre for Disease Control is soon to release new precautions. The revised guidelines contain two tiers of precautions combining the major features of Universal Precautions and

Body Substance Isolation with a second tier of precautions for patient known or suspected to be infected or colonised with epidemiologically important organisms.

Other changes to our practice of Universal Precautions could be necessary if the Draft guidelines for the Prevention of Transmission of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, recently released by the National Health and Medical Research Council are adopted. This document seriously challenges the principle of Universal Precautions making them unworkable in their entirety. For example, to be able to practice the same precautions for all patients, instruments will require to be autoclaved at 134° for 18 minutes which would add considerably to the already heavy work load and cost in our sterilisation departments. The Executive have the opportunity to make recommendations for changes to this document and shall keep you informed of developments.

Amendments to our constitution were eluded to at the Annual General Meeting in Canberra and are necessary if the organisation is to function efficiently. These amendments will be prepared and presented to each stage giving adequate time for assessment before being put to the vote. A formal structure for meetings is also under review and will be ready prior to the AGM in Sydney.

The executive works hard for you in their own time and requests your support and co-operation for the efficient running of a very busy Association.

Finally, and on your behalf, I congratulate the Editorial Committee for another excellent journal of which we can be justly proud. I am aware of the enormous task associated with the production of such a journal with deadlines to meet and frustrations to overcome. Your support and above all your contributions are essential. If the papers presented at the conferences in Canberra are a guide, Infection Control Nurses in Australia are equal to their peers in other countries in the work they are doing and should be sharing this information with others through their own journal. Be a contributor and add to the success.

Madeleine McPherson
President