

## National commitment results in essential change

**Claire Boardman** Past President (ACIPC) 2007–2012

Torres Strait & Northern Peninsula Health Service – Infection Control & Epidemiology,  
Thursday Island Hospital, Douglas Street, Thursday Island, Qld 4875, Australia.  
Email: [claire\\_boardman@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:claire_boardman@health.qld.gov.au)

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Dear Editor,

‘It always seems impossible until it’s done.’ — Nelson Mandela

Almost 20 years ago as a young nurse I entered the field of Infection Control in a small Victorian private hospital. With almost no experience or knowledge of such things pertaining to reducing the infection risk to patients I most likely set about creating a good deal more work than was necessary. As time passed and I moved from a novice to a competent infection control consultant my network of similar-minded professionals developed and provided invaluable advice and guidance along the way. Their leadership opened up a new world and greater challenges and I began to question the scope and practice of the Infection Control Professional (ICP).

In the late 1990s the landscape of Infection Control in Victoria began to change. The role of the ICP was well recognised and a state-wide review of infection control services was undertaken. Following this review the former DHS funded 30 new ICP positions across the State, some of which remain today. Shortly after the Victorian Nosocomial Infection Surveillance System (VICNISS) Coordinating Centre was opened and began to monitor infection rates in Victorian hospitals. The role of the ICP began to take on more definition and greater accountability and there were new opportunities. During this time I became closely involved with the former State Association, VICPA, where astute minds debated issues and raised the profile of those working in infection control.

In 2004, shortly after joining the Executive of the former AICA, I became engaged in an extension of local IC activities at a National level. My first meeting was what can only be described as an eye opener. Dolly Oleson was a leader of great foresight and connection and was responsible for the creation of the National Advisory Board for surveillance of HAIs. Much later, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare (ACSQHC) was formed and the HAI program developed in chief by Dr Marilyn Cruickshank which has enabled participation of all skill levels of ICP in a range of Commission funded initiatives. The membership of the College has benefited enormously from working

closely with the Commission and we are well represented on key committees. When consistent clear messages are communicated by the peak body, significant gains can be made.

I cannot recall whether I was coerced or encouraged to take a bigger role in the development of the profession; however, I do recall that (in time) volunteering for the VICPA and AICA Executives became professionally and personally rewarding. There are many benefits in volunteering, one of which is to create the kind of community or landscape that you want. Committed individuals are needed to pass on skills acquired and to ensure that there is corporate memory and adequate succession planning. I look back on my time as a novice and wonder if I knew such a thing as a mentor existed whether challenges could have been a little easier. I have been fortunate to have been guided by some excellent mentors, notably Glenda Gorrie (Vic.), Philip Russo (former Chair of NCSC) and Deborough Macbeth. More recently I have been privileged to work with my dear friend and colleague, Clinton Dunkley and with Ramon Shaban and Brett Mitchell. These clever and patient people have given much to our profession and we could do with a great deal more of them.

On behalf of the ACIPC and as outgoing President, I wish to express sincere thanks to all members of the NCSC past and present and to Phil Russo for his excellent leadership, level approach and professionalism during some particularly challenging interactions with our membership. I have only heard positive things about the skills and approach of the NCSC and their support for me as President was essential during the transition when I had at times questioned whether it was worth it and whether it was really going to happen. The former AICA Executive put in place firm timelines to guide the process and we were tough in our expectations. On occasion there was palpable tension as we crept closer to our goal and there were whispers that it couldn’t be achieved in the timeframe. The NCSC never failed to deliver and they have all done a marvellous job. We acknowledge the time each of you expended while putting your work and, at times, home life on hold to achieve the ultimate goal for AICA – to wind up and re-open as a new entity.

I am enormously proud of what we have achieved in less than 2 years and believe we have set the groundwork now for solid change and leadership in Infection Prevention and Control.

As the outgoing and retiring Presidents, Sylvia Gandossi and I wish both Marija and Elizabeth all the best in their exciting new roles and look forward to seeing the College grow under their leadership. With the new Operations Manager, permanent Secretariat and appointment of our members to the four foundation committees, I am confident we are well placed as the Australasian College for Infection

Prevention and Control to take advantage of several new opportunities on the horizon. The success of the College is dependent on engagement of the membership and your participation in our activities is vital to growth and innovation.

‘Where you stand depends on where you sit.’ — Nelson Mandela

### **Conflict of interest**

I have no conflicts to declare and did not receive any funding in relation to this letter.