

Education Review: IPAC COURSE, CENTENNIAL COLLEGE

Submitted by Cathie Walker, Care Partners

As the designated ICP for CarePartners it became increasingly evident last year that I did not have the knowledge required to address the challenges of the role so I attended the CHICA-approved Centennial College Infection Prevention & Control Course in Scarborough. I thought I would share my perspective on this course with other ICPs who are thinking of pursuing this form of learning.

The course is a combination of 2 weeks in class and 4 months online (an alternate version is available that is 100% by distance education). It started in the middle of October and finished in the middle of March. First the cost – it is considerable- tuition was \$1800 and hotel costs were \$1200 – supper each night and transportation are additional expenses. The good news is that there are ways to reduce the costs- for instance many attending had the cost covered by their employer, some stayed in residence or shared rooms, and the SARS Fund will pay out the cost of the tuition if the student has no financial assistance from any other source. The APIC manual was a required but costly textbook and I was able to borrow one from the SWOICN on CD.

The class consisted of 40 students from a variety of health care sectors and from many provinces. This diversity was a great benefit – for 10 days you had the opportunity to network with ICPs from across Canada who worked in acute care, public health, mental health, LTC and home care – the informal learning was incredible. The structure of the course supported this networking – you sat at round tables during class, you chatted during coffee breaks, you ate lunch (free) and if you liked even supper together and you worked in groups.

The 10 days of classes were full days and the format was primarily lecture with PowerPoint slides – this was very challenging if you were used to being on the move all day and many class members groaned and moaned through the first few days as their bodies and brains adjusted - however in the end, painful as it was, we all adapted.

Considering my pragmatic objectives, did the course provide useful learning? Absolutely! The course addressed everything that a beginning ICP needs from the structure of cell walls of pathogens to reprocessing equipment to developing an IPC program. The instructors were all seasoned veterans working in the acute care IPC field. The volume of material covered was truly astounding and we were pointed in the direction of many more additional resources beyond our classroom notes.

Three weeks after we headed home we had to write an online exam – as is true for many adult learners this caused me tremendous anxiety but I achieved a passing mark so it was a lot of worrying for nothing. There was value to the exam as it gave me the motivation I needed to really become intimate with material that was covered at lightening speed during the classroom lectures.

After the first few days of classes, students were organized into groups of 6 and each of these groups spent the second week sitting at a table together – the six members of our group got to know each other very well which was a good thing as for the next 4 months we worked collaboratively on 6 case studies using email and the Centennial College website to communicate. The work that happened during these case studies was very fruitful in terms of learning- members of our group searched for resources, consulted experts and produced assignments that were a product of our collective experiences and knowledge.

So would I recommend this course to others? Yes – but you have to be prepared to work hard. For me sitting in class and absorbing lectures was a challenge – for others writing assignments was a challenge – everyone found the thought of writing an exam stressful. But we got through it... and this course certainly provides not only an excellent foundation for the beginning ICP but it also facilitates both the networking and life long learning that are such an integral part of the practice of ICP.



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