



APIC 2018 Sneak Peek

Conversations with plenary speakers Alicia Cole and Jessica Green, PhD

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A PIC 2018, which takes place June 13–15 in Minneapolis, promises to offer a robust learning experience with more than 100 educational sessions and workshops led by experts from around the globe. A highlight is always the plenary sessions, which provide new perspectives on common infection prevention issues. This year's plenary keynote speakers are sure to add a new dimension to your thinking. *Prevention Strategist* recently spoke with Alicia Cole and Jessica Green, PhD, who offered a sneak peek of what they plan to cover during their presentations.

APIC 2018 sneak peek with Alicia Cole



Alicia Cole—actress, health educator, and patient advocate—will be the opening speaker at APIC 2018. In 2006, what was supposed to be a 2-day hospital stay for her rapidly descended into a two-month battle to save her life from the ravages of severe sepsis and necrotizing fasciitis. Since then, she has fought for system-wide improvement by serving on the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Healthcare-Associated Infection Advisory Committee, and by currently serving a four-year term on the Presidential Advisory Council on Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria (PACCARB). Her incredible healthcare odyssey is a 10-year case study of the state of healthcare, healthcare-associated infections (HAIs), and patient safety.

Q: CAN YOU GIVE US A PREVIEW OF WHAT YOU WILL BE SHARING DURING YOUR TALK AT APIC'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE?

I'm very excited to be at this year's APIC conference! The work being done by your membership is so crucial. I think the most important thing I can share is my story and my experience. I hope I might inspire those whose life's work is preventing infections and who know how to do it better than anyone in the facility to "take the lead." Now more than ever, patients need you!

“It shook me to my core to learn that more than two million other patients in the United States had suffered from an agonizing HAI that year, just like me. Even more sobering was learning that more than 100,000 of them would not survive.”

Q: YOU GOT INTO THIS FIELD BECAUSE OF YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A PATIENT; CAN YOU WALK US THROUGH YOUR JOURNEY?

I consider myself a sort of “accidental advocate.” It wasn’t something that I planned or even knew existed. On my bedridden days, I couldn’t sit up at the computer, so on a whim, I ordered a “talk-to-type” program and, lying there with a headset, began blogging and using social media to share my road to recovery with others. I taught myself how to use editing software and began making videos to document the struggles of affected patients.

In just a few months, the Myspace group I created for survivors and families touched by hospital infections and medical errors grew to more than 2,500 people. Suddenly, established healthcare organizations from across the country began calling to ask about my “organization”! The defining moment came when I received a call from the Consumers Union Safe Patient Project inviting me as one of their “Power 50” advocates to attend a patient safety summit and advocates training. It changed my life! I learned about advocacy, healthcare policy, and infections 101. I left there knowing that this was my new calling.



Alicia Cole at the swearing-in for the Presidential Advisory Council on Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria.

Q: WHAT DID YOU LEARN EARLY ON THAT SURPRISED YOU?

Initially, the sheer numbers and the magnitude of HAIs. I had no idea. In my ignorance, I just assumed that infections only happened to people who did not keep their cuts and scrapes clean.

It shook me to my core to learn that more than two million other patients in the United States had suffered from an agonizing HAI that year, just like me. Even more sobering was learning that more than 100,000 of them would not survive. The more I learned, the more I also became filled with great anger and disappointment. (Only one in four providers washes their hands between patients!?) Then, my hospital was cited by the local health department for not reporting my infection to them as mandated by law—a fact I find all the more appalling given that one of those months was spent in intensive care, fighting for my life!

Q: IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT DO YOU THINK NEEDS TO BE DONE TO ADDRESS HAIs?

So much can be said on this subject. I think the most urgent and practical needs are those which address HAIs at the bedside and facility-wide levels. Time and again, hospitals across the country have demonstrated that we already have the knowledge to prevent deaths due to hospital infections.

I would also like to see the government create an incentive program for infection prevention similar to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Electronic Health Record (EHR) Incentive Programs. These programs provided incentive payments to eligible professionals and hospitals as they adopted, implemented, upgraded, or demonstrated meaningful use of certified EHR technology.

To read the interview with Alicia Cole visit apic.org/ac2018/interview-with-alicia-cole.



APIC 2018 sneak peek with Jessica Green, PhD



Jessica Green, PhD, is an engineer and ecologist who specializes in biodiversity theory and microbial systems. Jessica uses approaches at the interface of microbiology, ecology, and data science to understand complex ecosystems with trillions of diverse microorganisms interacting with each other, with humans, and with the environment. She has been honored with numerous awards, including a Blaise Pascal International Research Chair, a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and a TED Senior Fellowship. Jessica is a professor of biology at the University of Oregon, where she codirects the Biology and Built Environment Center (BioBE), and is external faculty at the Santa Fe Institute.

Q: CAN YOU GIVE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WHAT YOU'LL BE SHARING WITH US AT APIC'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE?

I'll be sharing new perspectives on indoor environmental quality based on published microbiome research and will touch upon emerging technologies and health-care environments.

Q: AS A PROFESSOR, HOW DO YOU ENGAGE WITH YOUR STUDENTS TO DRAW OUT THEIR PASSION AND GET THEM EXCITED?

One way to engage students is to actively involve them in research. As an example, I worked with undergraduate students on a project to examine how direct contact among humans might impact the skin microbiome. We used roller derby as our model system and published our research here: <https://peerj.com/articles/53/>.

Q: WHAT PROJECT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

I am working on a lot of projects at the moment! One project I am working on at the University of Oregon is focused on understanding how daylighting impacts the viability and composition of microbial communities in indoor dust.

Q: WHAT DO YOU SEE ON THE HORIZON FOR THE FIELD OF INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL?

My sense is that infection prevention and control is becoming increasingly grounded in microbial ecology. Rather than focusing on individual pathogens, we now have access to technology that allows us to understand how individual pathogens respond to the entire indoor ecosystem.

Q: WHAT CAN APIC MEMBERS DO TO HELP FACILITATE A HEALTHY MICROBIAL ENVIRONMENT?

Advocate for, sponsor, and engage in microbiome research in your facility. The more research and development that takes place in healthcare facilities, the faster we will learn. An example of this type of research can be found here: <https://www.nature.com/articles/ismej2011211>.

Q: AND FINALLY, WHAT EXCITES YOU?

As an entrepreneur, I'm excited about developing technologies that one day may improve the lives of people and the planet. I also love learning and very much look forward to the APIC conference. 

To read more about our keynote speakers and see the education being offered, visit apic.org/AC2018