



# A conversation with Sharon Parrillo, BSN, RN, CIC

**SHARON PARRILLO** is the assistant director of infection prevention at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset. She is a recipient of a 2017 Chapter Leader Award and past president of the Northern NJ Chapter, which received the 2017 Chapter Excellence Award in Clinical and Professional Practice (Large). Sharon started her infection prevention career in corrections in 2004 and moved to acute care in 2009, becoming board certified in 2010.

tense moments. It's pushing forward when you want to give up, and encouraging others along in their journey.

### What is your leadership style?

I believe, the majority of the time, I am a transformational leader; it is inherent to the nature of our work. In order to achieve quality organizational goals, we motivate others to do more than they feel is possible. I've learned the "why" is so critically important to gaining buy-in for new initiatives. When people know why they must do something, it makes change easier to swallow and compliance increases. I've also learned to loosen my grip on how initiatives are rolled out. We set goals and we educate on best practices, but does it really matter how we get there? Each department has its own internal culture, and what works for one area may not work for everyone. Allow staff to be a part of the design and they will own the outcomes.

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### How did you get involved in your local APIC chapter?

When I made the transition to acute care in 2009, I was fortunate to work under the leadership of someone who was very active in our local APIC chapter. She made attending meetings a priority. I started attending meetings regularly in 2010 and decided to join the board in 2013 as treasurer.

### What are some challenges you have faced as a chapter leader?

One of the challenges is keeping the balance. Work and home life pull me in many directions, especially with a 19-month-old little boy at home. I've learned to set priorities within the chapter, schedule, and tackle them. It's unreasonable to think you will be able to fix or change everything during your leadership tenure with your local APIC chapter. Choose one thing and go for it; set up the team for success to tackle the next item on the list when you hand over the reins the following year.

### How has your experience within APIC translated to your work as an IP?

My involvement in the APIC Northern NJ Chapter has been very beneficial to my work as an infection preventionist (IP). Having a large group of professionals to network with is helpful in times when the answers are not exactly black and white. I have enjoyed learning from colleagues with different leadership styles than my own, and incorporating new ideas when the opportunities arise.

### What does leadership mean to you?

Leadership means listening, problem-solving, and educating. It means being flexible and available for consultation in

### What were the defining moments of your career?

Two moments initially come to mind: a local measles outbreak in 2013 and Ebola

preparation in 2014; both nearly broke me. It is amazing what we are able to accomplish while food- and sleep-deprived.

The most defining moment of my career is how I actually ended up in this field. I initially interviewed for a corrections staff nurse position back in 2004, and, after my interview, the director began introducing me to everyone as the new infection control nurse.

I had told her I didn't have any experience in that specialty, and she said, "Don't worry, you'll figure it out." The rest is history.

### Who has helped you along the leadership journey?

I am very fortunate in my career to have worked alongside many strong leaders. Two stand out immediately: Pat Lafaro

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and Amanda Hessels. Their mentorship has strengthened and encouraged me more times than I can count, and I am thankful for the opportunity to know them.

### Do you have any advice for other chapter officers on boosting chapter participation?

Meeting attendance remains a challenge for many of us. We currently have 185 active chapter members; however, average attendance at meetings is approximately 25 to 35. As the profession evolves and practitioners are asked to “do more with less,” it is difficult to dedicate time for chapter meetings. In 2018, our chapter will be experimenting with what we are calling “the traveling show.” Meetings will be held at various locations throughout the region in hopes of boosting attendance. We are also hosting an evening meeting for the first time this year.

### Do you have any advice for an IP looking to get involved as a chapter leader?

Jump right in! Attend your local chapter meetings and ask how you can get involved. Board members will be more than happy to help guide you. Speak to individuals who have held leadership roles in the past to get an inside scoop on what to expect. Sometimes it's simply saying “yes” when a nominating committee representative calls to ask if you would consider running for a leadership position. The individuals currently in those roles are not superhuman; you too can do this! 