2020 PRESCIENTX SCHOLARSHIP

Katharina Kovacs Burns is a current and active member of Patients for Patient Safety Canada, but has also been in patient safety with the WHO Patient Safety Alliance through the International Alliance of Patient Organizations since 2005. Katharina was one of ten individuals in Canada who helped to establish a Canadian patient safety group and co-founded PFPSC in 2007. Her interests in patient safety include the prevention and control of infections not only with patients in acute care settings but also with clients in community settings and the general public as part of Public Health and health promotion. Katharina’s experiences with infection education and prevention cross several boundaries that includes a personal, professional and academic interest.

Katharina has had experiences as a caregiver with various infections that have plagued her elderly parents in Continuing Care and acute care facilities, all of which could have been prevented. Most of these episodes could have been prevented by healthcare providers taking prevention precautions including washing their hands or gloving up prior to following through with various procedures, particularly with her father who had pressure ulcers requiring daily cleaning and bandage changes. He acquired an infection that inflamed his pressure ulcer to a point where he required hospitalization and surgery, as well as infection control procedures. Both parents have acquired lung infections from staff who were ill and at work. She has seen healthcare providers coming to work or visitors coming into long-term care facilities when they were ill with colds or flus. Katharina has made it a point to talk with residents and the care providers in her parents’ facility about prevention related to spreading infections as well as general patient safety in their daily practices with the facility residents.

In addition to personal family/caregiver concerns and roles in infection prevention, Katharina is also an academic in Public Health. As part of her academic role, she teaches multidisciplinary public health courses during which she relates her personal and family experiences and stories about public health issues, infection and other safety areas of concern and prevention strategies. She also brings in experts to talk with students about infections, prevention and safety. And as a professional working in a large healthcare system in Alberta, Katharina is conscientious about the practices of healthcare providers at all levels and areas of care from acute to community settings. Reinforcing hand hygiene and other basic prevention practices are part of the continuous quality improvement strategies she discusses with all staff and help them measure and co-design quality improvement strategies to improve their performance at the clinical care level. Katharina works in Clinical Quality Metrics and works with all staff at unit, site and program levels to engage them in prevention measures and improvement strategies. Personal stories including her own help to emphasize the need for double checking approaches to infection prevention along with safety/prevention checklists and other decision aides which help reinforce good practices.

Experiences and expertise through personal, academic and work are things she brings as a member of PFPSC in her capacity and capability to discuss and inform, educate, and promote infection awareness/understanding and prevention practices for patients/clients and families and the public.

IPAC Canada and Prescientx look forward to the opportunity to finally meet Katharina at the 2021 National Education Conference.