

Member of the Month

Merry Sheeran

Interviewed and written by Hillary Hei

Merry, second from left, with her family



Role: APIC consultant

Years of IP service: 24 (and always in long-term care!)

Merry was first introduced to infection prevention while studying Biology at Chestnut Hill College, mentored by Maryann Santa Maria who was an IP at Chestnut Hill Hospital. Merry's interest was stoked, and she continued to learn her "bugs and drugs" as a research assistant in Microbiology and Immunology at Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. Her next step was nursing school, and upon completion she went right into long-term care (LTC). After a few years, she transitioned to the IP role after support from her mentor, Lorrain Harkavy (past national APIC president in 1987). Merry's career trajectory since has not been a straight line – she has worked in many areas of LTC but has always stayed involved in infection prevention either working in a facility or as a consultant. When COVID hit she was working for 2 skilled nursing facilities, and she has since transitioned to be an APIC consultant performing Infection Control Assessment of Risk (ICARs) for LTC facilities in Pennsylvania.

Proudest professional accomplishment? Using her work experience and APIC relationships to survive the pandemic. Merry stated that through the APIC community, her CIC prep, and relationships with other seasoned IPs, she had the confidence to lead her LTC skilled facilities and personal care homes through COVID. She stated, "COVID brought out my [IP] community."

Best piece of professional advice: Confirm the outbreak. Merry has many experiences where people begin to panic over a funky rash (*scabies!*), but she's aware that sometimes it's more about watching and waiting. As a leader, she knows that "If I remain calm, everyone else will remain calm. If I panic, everyone else will panic."

What continues to draw her to the field: She loves to teach, and she particularly loves antibiotic stewardship. A future goal is to get her MPH to do education in Public Health.

Hardest challenge: COVID in the LTC setting was hard, especially when she had a COVID outbreak before any mitigation strategies were in place. "Seeing residents and friends getting sick – that was horrible," Merry stated. "The hardest part was trying to reestablish trust from staff, especially after going against everything we always taught them."

How she made work 'work': By keeping a sense of humor. She loves to talk about 'gross stuff' because it makes microbiology and infection control fun.

Advice for new IPs: Don't take on too much too fast. Be comfortable with saying 'no' to additional responsibilities until you get the basics such as surveillance and the lay of the facility. Lastly, don't forget to give yourself grace to learn.

"Everything came together through COVID, even though I was so fearful in the beginning."

Other fun facts about Merry:

Favorite movie: Dead Poet's Society

Hobbies: Brewing beer at home (ask about her Buzz beer), making soy candles with essential oils.

Pets: 2 cats—Jack and Jill

Nickname: Force, as in 'May the force be with you'

Hidden talent: plays violin and piano. (Merry previously competed in classical composition competitions!)

Favorite item: Vicks VapoRub ("I use it for everything!")



Merry can be reached at: mcsheeran@msn.com