

DR JOAN FAOAGALI AWARD WINNER

Meet Jessie Haeusler, winner of the 2024 Dr Joan Faoagali Award



The Dr Joan Faoagali Award was set up by the College to honour Joan in celebration of her life and her considerable contribution to the IPC profession. The winner of the scholarship is awarded FIPC course fees. This year's recipient is Jessie Haeusler. We caught up with Jessie to congratulate her on her award and discuss her life and work in IPC.

Congratulations on your win Jessie! Thanks for taking the time to chat with us. Can you tell us a bit about your current role?

I am a Registered Nurse and Team Leader at Aspen Aged Health Care (AAHC). As part of Aspen Medical's Standing Force within AAHC, I really enjoy leading a rapid response team, providing essential emergency interim staffing for Australian Residential Aged Care Homes (RACH) during significant stressors like a COVID-19 outbreak or other threats such as flooding or cyclones.

I enjoy supporting and uplifting RACH staff in collaboration with the Approved Provider, identifying and mitigating risks through a risk assessment.

I am also active in providing contextualised and current guidance in daily practices to ensure that strict adherence to infection control protocols is understood and practiced, helping prevent and control the spread of infections.

What attracted you to a career in IPC?

My passion for infection prevention and control (IPC) stems from its problem-solving nature, the ability to make a tangible difference in vulnerable people's health outcomes, and the opportunity to advocate for the safety of patients and residents, my team, and myself.

It all started before the COVID-19 pandemic. I was an infectious disease nurse with Queensland Health for eight years and loved my job. In an infectious disease ward, you get to work with various patients, including those from medical, surgical, oncology, and trauma backgrounds, which gives you a diverse range of skills and experiences. Infection prevention is as important in RACHs as it is in acute care settings. Effective IPC practices minimise the need for additional treatments and prevent severe health complications.



That is what I love about IPC. It is a part of everything we do as healthcare workers. When you successfully implement IPC measures and see a reduction in infections, it gives you a real sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

Your work takes you to remote places in Australia. What are the particular challenges for IPC in these settings?

Providing critical staffing support and IPC guidance to RACHs and previously as a Remote Area Nurse (RAN) in acute care settings has allowed me the privilege of caring for our most vulnerable communities.

The challenges are significant. Community settings often present additional IPC hurdles, including a lack of public awareness, housing, and overcrowding, leading to outbreaks of skin and respiratory diseases not commonly seen in metropolitan hospitals or communities, such as scabies, impetigo, and group A strep. I have witnessed firsthand the shortage of resources and the occasional lack of clean water, which can be challenging for many reasons, especially for those requiring access to lifesaving haemodialysis treatment.

What did you enjoy most about the FIPC course?

Participating in the FIPC course was an excellent refresher for me. It grounded me in the basics and enhanced my ability to assist the facilities I visit more effectively. The self-paced nature of the course allowed me to balance work, study, and personal life effectively. I particularly enjoyed the focus on auditing and surveillance, which I had been trying to get my head around for some time before this course.

What would you say to anyone considering doing the course?

Go for it! Whether you are just starting out or looking to revisit the fundamentals, it is an excellent opportunity. I strongly encourage active participation and making the most of what the course has to offer. The knowledge and skills you will pick up can be incredibly relevant and directly applicable to your daily infection prevention and control work. It is all about incorporating that knowledge into everyday practices to improve patient and resident care and safety.

A pathology newsletter article stated that Dr Joan Faoagali lived by the motto, "If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well." This resonates deeply with me, I believe this knowledge, when applied, can help you do your job well.

You obviously have a very busy working life, what do you like to do to unwind? Any hobbies or interests you'd care to share with us?

I love getting away for a weekend; kayaking or a bike ride always relaxes me. My current role has taught me to be spontaneous, a trait my family has also embraced. I can be assigned to any location in Australia with minimal notice, so my main interest is the simple pleasure of gathering with my family for a meal or a coffee.