

ABSA
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Biosafety Month

Promoting a Culture of Biosafety and Responsibility

Biosafety professionals can have a significant impact on life or death situations involving biological materials. This message is unfortunately illustrated in a LAI training exercise conducted by Karen Byers. Read more about Karen's unexpected experience when discussing fatal Neisseria meningitides case study with a workshop group. These types of messages can be valuable in explaining the importance of biosafety stewardship. Use this article to leverage upper management support and buy-in for biosafety programs during the upcoming biosafety month.

I was presenting another clinical biosafety workshop to a group of public health and clinical laboratory staff. The session was going extremely well and I was gratified by the level of interaction. I presented published case study details that had led to laboratory acquired infections in clinical laboratories in the US and Canada. Participants responded when I asked for recommendations on preventing re-occurrence, and the discussions were lively and on-point. I went through scenarios such as E.coli 0157 accidentally replacing the gram negative control for antibiotic sensitivity, and the re-streaking of a Brucella isolate out on the bench that resulted in an outbreak in a large microbiology laboratory. By the time we finished the case study about a student who infected several coworkers by contaminating the hand washing sink faucet with Shigella, everyone in the room had shared a story about how they had re-educated a student intern who was skeptical about necessity of following established laboratory safety practices.



Karen B Byers, MS, RBP, CBSP

Confident that I was really connecting with the workshop participants, I moved on to review some fatal *Neisseria meningitidis* case studies. I followed the same format, and flashed details from MMWR on the

screen. The level of participant engagement suddenly crashed; it was obvious. Everyone was looking down or away; no one responded to my discussion questions. Where did I go wrong? Was a whole morning of case studies just too much? Maybe I had put in too many details, coaxed out too much discussion? It wasn't a problem in previous sessions. Clueless, I soldiered on and finished my slides.

The organizer thanked me, and announced where lunch would be. Participants clapped and filed out. I went up to the organizer to ask how she thought the session went. She blurted out - "I knew her! Most of us knew her. I had no idea that her case was in the MMWR, or that you would talk about her. I knew her, and she was one of us."

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ABSA International is pleased to be a part of 2018 Biosafety Month, "Promoting a Culture of Biosafety and Responsibility" and encourages all biosafety professionals to "Get Your Culture On!" #getyourcultureon.

For more information on 2018 Biosafety Month and access to additional resources visit:
<https://absa.org/event/2018-biosafety-month/>



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