

Tip of the Month



**Catch Me
If You Can**

Pssst. Hey, Buddy...can you help me out? I'm in a little trouble. Who am I? Well...I can't tell you. It would defeat the purpose. You don't need to know. Nobody does. All I can tell you is I'm just an innocent little bacterium minding my own business. It just so happens that I'm minding it in your patient's bloodstream.

Things were going along just fine until she spiked a fever. That's just not being a very good host. Now some "Doctor Do-good" is ordering two sets of blood cultures so they can find me and kill me. And for what? Multiplying? C'mon! Since when did that become a crime? Just look at me. Do I look like I can hurt anyone? I'm so small you wouldn't even know I was here if I hadn't said anything. So help me avoid detection, will ya? Tell you what... you help hide me, and I'll show you how to become so efficient that your boss will hold you up as the standard all others should emulate. Are you in? Great!

If you're going to help me thrive within your patient, the first thing I need you to do is forget everything you were ever taught about aseptic technique. That includes site preparation. Besides, a friction scrub requires too much time and effort. And forget about that silly rule about letting the antiseptic sit on the skin for 30 seconds. You don't have time for that. Just give the site a quick swipe with an alcohol pad then wipe it off with gauze. No need to let it dry. That only increases its antiseptic effect. That way, my buddies in the Skin Flora Gang will survive and serve as decoys when you draw them into the bottle along with me. The microbiologists in the lab will think we're all just a bunch of harmless skin contaminants. Meanwhile, the true cause of the patient's brewing septicemia, *moi*, can continue to flourish in her bloodstream.

I'm all about making you look good, so if you need to repalpate the vein after cleansing, be my guest. You wouldn't want to have to restick her, would you? That will just slow you down. Besides, when you repalpate, you'll introduce other bacteria into the mix. That helps us both out. You won't have to waste time recleansing the site, and I'll have more pals joining me in the blood culture broth. It'll be a regular party, and what's wrong with that?

Here's another time saving tip: fill both sets of blood culture bottles from one venipuncture. Sure it's breaking the rules, but who's gonna know? You'll be moving on to your next patient in half the time. That makes you a model employee. Besides, if you draw skin contaminants into both sets, it creates that nice little smokescreen I just told you about. Better still, drawing two sets with just one venipuncture might mean you miss me altogether, resulting in a false-negative blood culture report. By the time the lab sorts it all out, I'll be hard to stop. But that's not your concern. You have other patients waiting...so let's hurry this along.

To speed things up even more, underfill the blood culture bottles. That lowers the odds I'll be identified, and makes you more productive. And forget about filling blood cultures in the proper order of draw; that's just too much to remember. Besides, if you fill them out of order you'll transfer bacteria from the tops of other tubes into the broth, making me look even more like a false positive. Talk about efficiency! Well, look at that! You're done in half the time! You're the model employee.

You've been a real sport about all this. They'll never catch me now. I can't thank you enough. Not only have you saved my life, but you've helped make your patient the perfect host.