



In her book, *Smart Nursing: How to Create a Positive Work Environment that Empowers and Retains Nurses*, June Fabré, MBA, RNC, offers tips on improving productivity in the nursing workplace.

Improving Nurse Utilization Provides Desired Outcomes

By Christina Orlovsky, senior staff writer

Nursing is such a high-demand profession that productivity in the workplace is always of the essence. However, in this time of a nursing shortage, utilization is not only desired, it is critical to patient safety, hospital costs and, especially critical to nurse satisfaction.

June Fabré, MBA, RNC, president of Smart Healthcare LLC, a consulting firm that focuses on health care strategies for nurses, managers and chief executive officers, talks about several keys to nurse utilization in her new book *Smart Nursing: How to Create a Positive Work Environment that Empowers and Retains Nurses*.

Fabré, who has been a nurse in various capacities for 40 years, explained that, first and foremost, guidance has to come from high up in the hospital administration.

"Successful nurse utilization really stems from the hospital's chief executive officer," she said. "Nurses can't function anymore in a command and control environment. The CEO has to have a different philosophy to have the right environment for nurses to thrive in."

An instrumental step toward creating a productive environment, said Fabré, is to treat nurses as knowledge workers instead of manual workers.

"Instead of saying, 'Do it more, do it faster,' organizations have to use nurses smarter," she said. "When we changed from horse-drawn buggies to automobiles, it didn't make a difference how much you beat the horses—they're still not going to out-produce the automobiles. Nurses work as hard as they can. Productivity has to come from working them smarter, not harder."

To this end, Fabré has established a set of key components to increasing productivity in the nursing workplace:

Show Respect

Fabré explained that there's a big problem with nurses not being respected—by their peers, their managers and by the administration.

"Disrespect lowers people's morale and energy," she explained. "Everyone wants nurses to do more work, but they treat them with disrespect. Nurses have very little power. I've worked in places where nurses had so little power that they voted with their feet and walked out."

Fabré added that in order for nurses to show respect to their peers, a respectful culture needs to be created from the higher ranks on down.

Create High-Performance Teams

One way to create a respectful work environment is to encourage a feeling of camaraderie among the entire staff. To do this, Fabré suggested forming high-performance teams in the units.

"If these teams are done right, you can accomplish much more than the sum of what everyone else can do," she said. "It gets so that you are just as happy about one of your peer's successes as you are your own."

Form Relationships

In order to make a nursing unit feel more like a team, Fabré said the key is to start small and build relationships.

"I encourage managers and nurses to work together," Fabré said. She called the importance of relationships "social capital," something that can't be measured, but is extremely valuable, and explained that this is the value that comes from nurses' relationships with patients as well as with hospital administrators.

"Many CEOs do not have much of a relationship with the front-line people," she said. "In other industries, the workers' relationship with the CEO is important. Somehow, that has gotten lost in health care."

Pass on the Power

In explaining how successful teams and relationships can be, Fabré recalled from personal experience a manager that delegated everything to her staff nurses.

In the best high-performance teams, the manager passes on some of the autonomy to the staff nurses, she said.

"She was our coach, not our manager," Fabré added. "By delegating tasks—we even had the power to do staffing—she would cut her own work down because we solved our own problems. I can't recall a single bad decision coming out of that unit."

In fact, Fabré asserted that in one year, by using the coaching style of management, her manager changed the hospital around, increasing patient satisfaction eight-fold in just one year.

“A lot has to do with the manager being a really good role model and not being judgmental,” she said. “We have to incorporate all the diversity—of ideas and cultures—that makes for a really rich work environment.”

Involve Nurses in Strategic Planning

In hospital environments, everyone should have the same goals, so everyone should be involved in planning strategies to meet those goals. Because nurses work directly with patients, they know what needs to be done. Fabré explained that the key is to listen to what the nurses have to say. She used the example of Massachusetts General Hospital, in Boston, Massachusetts, where a nursing representative from every unit is involved in monthly meetings with the hospital administration.

“Nurses can tell the CEOs and managers what the patients want,” she said, adding that this is essential to improving patient care, which, in turn, improves nursing.

“If nurses can have control and have a say and not be so overworked, things will definitely get better for the profession,” Fabré said. “When you love your work, you give it your heart and soul. That’s what we need back, and I think we can get it back.”

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