

Making the Impossible Possible Resolving the Nursing Crisis

By
June Fabre MBA RNC

Many nurses, managers and physicians would like to make a difference in the nursing crisis but the problem seems impossible. Use this outline to identify opportunities, plan and take practical action steps. Diagnose accurately; create a plan to treat the problem, not just the symptoms; and act on the plan, adjusting for individual situations.

Treat the Problem; Not just Symptoms

The nursing crisis is a symptom. The real problem is the powerlessness of nurses. Nurses become exhausted, not just from overwork. We become exhausted from the effort needed to follow directives over which we have no control.

A similar situation has occurred with physicians, some of whom say they are powerless to prescribe what is medically necessary if the insurance company denies care. That kind of loss of control, multiplied a hundred times, is what has been fueling the nursing crisis for the last ten years.

Suppose an organization cuts staffing, a decision frequently made by non-clinical staff. Nurses are given responsibility but no voice. Mistakes happen because nurses can't maintain safety standards. We are scared and angry about missing important symptoms because there is no time for adequate observation or follow-up. Non-clinical people look at numbers. We must look at the faces behind the numbers every single day.

Use Basic Management Principles to Plan

Regain Integrity & Trust. Management has allowed unsafe staffing. Nurses have had unrealistic expectations. Restoring trust involves describing our perspectives, cultivating mutual respect

and a having a better balance of power. We need to honor what each side brings to the table. Chaotic conditions increase the importance of integrity because integrity is an antidote to chaos.

Listen & communicate. Nursing input is frequently discounted, and we are sometimes reprimanded for having a different opinion. Listening identifies problems, validates feelings and promotes problem solving. Conversations sometimes reveal offensive behavior by powerful people and it takes a politically savvy organization to resolve these issues fairly.

Balance short term with long term solutions. Healthcare uses too many short-term solutions. This Band-Aid approach has resulted in a reservoir of unresolved issues: frustrated and burned out employees, dissatisfied patients and wasted resources.

Consider a universal example of the folly of too many quick fixes. Suppose a two-year-old has a tantrum. Occasionally giving in to the demands probably won't cause any harm. However, always using the quick fix and giving in to the demands will result in a monster at age 16. Healthcare has created its own kind of monster by using the quick fix too often.

Organizations have neglected long-term relationships while reacting to crises. Now relationships are a new crisis. According to Steven Covey in *the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, we should spend most of our time on important issues before they become urgent. Proactive nurse-management partnerships would avert many crises.

Ways to Plan by Using Nurses Smarterä

- **Trim costs without cutting quality**

Expect your nurses to have a big picture mentality. Teach them if they don't know how. Explain what's in it for them-- autonomy and control of their practice. Reward nurses who are willing to think strategically, cross train, and function in high-performance teams. Instead of just slashing staff, organizations

should seek the input of experienced nurses to perform the precise surgery needed to eliminate waste without adverse effects.

- **Empower your nursing staff to increase profit**

When you empower nurses, patient satisfaction and quality increase, and litigation decreases. We play a very strategic role in our organization's success.

- **Create a staff friendly culture**

People respond to personal warmth whether it comes from managers, customers or co-workers. Soft assets like caring, involvement, and imagination are the keys to hard assets such as profitability.

7 Opportunities to Take Action

1. Be a good role model so that nurses trust you. Be partners with your staff.
2. Improve communication. Listen with an open mind and avoid punitive attitudes.
3. Educate nurses to understand management's big picture. Consider nurses to be assets to be developed instead of expenses to be minimized. Invest in nurses, just as you would with any other asset.
4. Empower nurses to make timely decisions at the patient level. Then support them.
5. Create high performance teams to increase work quantity without decreasing quality.
6. Recognize nurses for our critical role in marketing. Having satisfied patients is the best marketing technique. Excellent nursing care creates patient satisfaction.
7. If you are a nurse, expand your horizons and speak up for nursing. Learn public speaking and how to write for publications.

The most important part of a journey is taking that first step. Treat nurses as valued professionals. Choose your planning strategies

and take action. Resolving the nursing crisis can happen if we all work together and start now.

June Fabre, MBA, RNC is President of Fabre Associates, LLC. She is a healthcare workshop leader, speaker and author specializing in Smart Nursing, innovative strategies for nurses, managers and CEO's. Contact her at phone (888) 844-8004, www.JuneFabre.com, write 18 Nichols Rd, Amherst, NH 03031 or info@junefabre.com