

Spreading Health Care Excellence the Smart Nursing Way Schedule a meeting of the best healthcare minds

By

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Excellence results from a meeting of the best healthcare minds. Excellence comes alive when both clinical nurses and management focus on providing the best patient care humanly possible. Excellence thrives in organizations using systems approaches to ensure that quality care is consistent and continues in the long term.

In my new book, Smart Nursing—How to Create a Positive Work Environment that Empowers and Retains Nurses, you will find more than 500 no-cost strategies that bring clinical nurses and management together. Smart Nursing is published by Springer Publishing Company, NYC and available at their web site: www.springerpub.com.

Promote critical thinking

Excellence requires that nurses and managers know how to think critically. Organizations that value staff support their thoughtful decisions. Excellence requires the kind of caring that views patient needs as more important than internal organizational politics.

For example, a nurse notices a potential safety problem. He would like to take immediate action to correct the situation, and would like to ensure that this problem does not recur. But he knows that other nurses have been censured for autonomous actions, and overstepping his boundaries may erode his small influence in the future. This how negative work environments interfere with patient safety and nurse satisfaction.

What about nurse-managers with high safety goals? Senior managers, who may have little or no clinical experience, often set

unrealistic staffing goals that do not match patient acuity. This quick fix approach interferes with long term safety efforts. If nurse-managers lack power to rectify understaffing, medical errors increase and patient care suffers. When staff resign to avoid working in this type of environment, the vicious cycle of medical errors and staff turnover end up raising costs instead of reducing them.

The solution is to engage the full professional capacity of both managers and clinical nurses. Delegating enough authority enables staff to match staffing with unit acuity. Prior to entrusting them with autonomy, the best organizations involve staff in their strategic plan. From my experience, this kind of staff involvement increases profitability because these staffing costs are offset by the higher revenues levels resulting from reputations of excellence.

Critical thinking raises patient satisfaction

- Make your nurses feel safe when being decisive. Always support them.
Delegate decision-making authority along with responsibility.
- Coach your nurses so that they can tweak their decision-making skills.
Sit down with staff members periodically, review their recent decisions, and guide them to become even better decision-makers.
- Substitute positive feedback for censure
Clinical nurses who are sure of their manager's support outperform other nurses.

Why don't nurses say, "yes" to patients more often?

Nurses feel **safe** when they can say; "I followed policy to the letter, even if patient needs remain unmet."

Suggestions for Clinical nurses who want to cultivate their critical thinking skills:

- Ask yourself, "Is this patient request illegal, unethical or harmful?" If not, find a way to fulfill most requests to a patient's satisfaction.
- Put yourself in the patient's place. Ask yourself, "What is motivating him or her? Why is it important to him or her?"
- Instead of saying, "No", find a way to say, "Yes." When patients ask for something, listen fully, and give them what they want if at all possible.
- Use your creativity. Innovate and start new patient satisfaction trends.

Rigidity is Expensive

- Rigidity wastes nursing time. Rigid protocols are hurdles for nurses to clear before they can focus on patient needs. Autonomous nurses who satisfy patients' needs with flexibility save time and raise patient satisfaction. Multiply these small segments of time saved by the number of nurses in your facility and then by their salary. The financial savings add up quickly.
- Rigidity interferes with patient satisfaction. Patients dislike waiting to have their needs met.
- Rigidity blocks patient safety because it prevents nurses from taking quick action to solve urgent problems.

Patient dissatisfaction diminishes your success and erodes your bottom line.

Non-healthcare businesses have become smaller, decentralized, and 'leaner and meaner'. This has made them more flexible and able to respond quickly to shifting market demand.

Organizational support of nurse autonomy resulted in high quality care, reduced risk, and effective teamwork.

Remember the adage: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Maximize your staff's expertise with coaching.

Coach your staff members to make good decisions instead of telling them what to do. Coaching and granting autonomy complement each other since both access the essence of your employees' greatest strengths.

Coaching creates a path for your employees' ideas to flow.

Are staff members able to solve employee disputes themselves, or do you have to intervene?

Are you a good leader, as well as a good manager? ["Leaders do the right things; managers do things right." (Warren Bemis)]

Do you discuss staffing goals with your nurses, and then give them autonomy to modify staffing levels as needed?

Have you implemented at least 95% of your staff members' suggestions within thirty days?

Do you insist on respectful behavior from everyone, no matter what his or her position?

A flexible and respectful environment spreads health care excellence because it highlights the professional expertise of your staff. You raise patient satisfaction when you set your staff free to use their professional judgment. This raises patient safety and excellence. This should be the primary objective of every health care organization

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