

## **Using Nurses Smarter®**

By  
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People waste nurses--they waste our time, ignore our potential and destroy our spirit.

Organizations value tasks. Our ideas and opinions are largely ignored. Our compassion that has contributed so much quality to healthcare is appreciated by patients, but disregarded by many others. Nursing management has little influence in the power game. This leaves nurses without any voice at all.

In their book, *From Silence to Voice*, Bernice Buresh and Suzanne Gordon say that nurses should not just sit at the tables of power, they should be listened to and respected for their views.

These problems are one side of a coin. On the other side of the coin are the opportunities---many opportunities for staff nurses, managers and physicians to use nurses smarter.

### **Principles of Using Nurses Smarter**

Some of the principles of using nurses smarter are respect, simplicity, and flexibility.

#### **Respect**

People respect nurses more than any other profession, surpassing physicians, teachers and dentists according to a 1999 Honesty and Ethics Gallup poll.

Organizations should show respect for nurses by giving us power to control our practice, credit for our accomplishments, and opportunities to fully utilize our skills

The National Institute of Health is now very involved with improving patient safety. Nurses have long been concerned about unsafe practices and could have prevented many of the problems if our suggestions had been respected more.

## **Simplicity**

Simplicity is a second way to use nurses smarter. Healthcare is complex by nature because it involves so many diverse people. But we have made healthcare unnecessarily complex. No matter how detailed your policies are, what you need the most are competent professions who can think critically, make smart decisions and be excellent ambassadors for your organization. The reason is that policies are black and white and patient care situations come in shades of gray. You need good staff to interpret the policies wisely. The department store, Nordstroms, has only one policy: "Satisfy the customer." Healthcare still hasn't achieved that goal even with all of our complexity.

## **Flexibility**

Healthcare has been too flexible with core values like honesty and too rigid with practices, such as how nurses are utilized. We have the equation backwards. We should be rigidly guarding our core values. And we should be flexible with nurse utilization by implementing sensible and innovative work schedules and using high performance teams. In *The Corporate Mystic*, Gay Hendricks says, "Corporate mystics are fiercely disciplined, but it is a discipline born of passion. This type of discipline makes them flexible and adaptable rather than rigid."

## **Use the Principles to Solve Management Challenges**

Apply the principles of using nurses smarter to management challenges such as time management, staff retention and money.

## **Time Management**

Using nurses smarter saves everyone time. Managers save time when they are flexible enough to delegate decision-making authority. They can use the time they save to build relationships that improve retention. Nurses become more efficient when they have autonomy. Patient satisfaction improves when their problems are solved promptly, making it unnecessary for them to repeat their requests.

## **Staff Retention**

If you want to retain good nurses, create a staff friendly organizational culture. Employees are more productive when there is genuine respect for everyone. We are good because we care. Why make caring impossible for us? It destroys our morale, saps our energy, and you end up losing value.

Ann O'Sullivan, testified on behalf of the American Nurses Association to the Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee, and said, "Nurses are, understandably, reluctant to accept positions in which they will face inappropriate staffing, be confronted by mandatory overtime, inappropriately rushed through patient care activities and face retaliation if they report unsafe practices."

When nurses see unsafe practices, they start looking for better places to work. When they can't find better places to work, they leave nursing.

## **Money**

Using nurses smarter increases revenue and decreases expenses because nurses are renewable resources with substantial value, but not if you burn us out. It's simple common sense. Consider the financial consequences of burnout. Revenue producing units are closed due to a lack of staff. Staff turnover expenses drain resources from the organization. And there are too many tired nurses functioning well below their potential.

**What you can do if you are a Staff Nurse, Manager or Physician**

Staff nurses, managers, and physicians can all use nurses smarter.

If you are a staff nurse, expect respect from others and learn to speak up so that you can communicate your ideas effectively. This may involve learning assertiveness, public speaking and writing for publication. One cause of the nursing crisis has been our invisibility. Although we are major healthcare players, we have minimal influence. Show your organization that you have more to offer than just performing tasks.

If your role is in management, develop your staff so that they too can eventually become leaders. Decision-making, critical thinking and teamwork can all be learned. Be flexible, invest in your staff, and encourage them to invest in themselves as well.

If you are a physician, view nurses as partners. We are important to your own success because we spend so much time with your patients. We see potential complications early, and inform you in time to intervene.

Consider using nurses smarter in your organization. Appreciate your nursing professionals and help them be more effective. Create an environment in your organization where everyone can win.

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