

What Nurses Need to Change

By

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Nurses lose credibility when our solutions are unrealistic. We should take time to think about our actions. Consider adopting the following changes.

Use tools sensibly

We have many good tools but sometimes sabotage their effectiveness. Good tools, when carried to the extreme, become liabilities instead of assets.

Nursing care plans are a perfect example of misuse of a good tool. We critically needed care plans when they were introduced. Prior to care plans, nurses on each shift had to either ask patients to describe their needs or discover them through an inconsistent reporting system. Many people wanted care plans to be a customized outline. Some wanted them to be more complete and initiated the era of standard care plans. We wrote care plans for every conceivable illness, laminated them and inserted them into the kardex. Since they were cumbersome and not individualized, nurses did not use them. We wasted a lot of time and money.

Multidisciplinary treatment planning is another example of how a good tool can be misused. Years ago, the average psychiatric patient's length of stay was 2-3 weeks. Now it is often 2-3 days. However, the treatment team planning process hasn't changed. We should be able to write excellent plans in less time. One time, a nurse was the only one available to care for patients because the rest of the staff were at the treatment team meeting. Planning is important, but shouldn't our priority be actually giving the care? This is an opportunity to decrease expenses without decreasing quality.

Broaden your knowledge

We are reluctant to adopt good ideas from other disciplines. Is healthcare so unique that we are blind to the successes of others? Consider the following examples:

When we adopted critical paths in the early 90's, many people considered them to be a new tool. But, critical paths were not new. Companies have used them to calculate the shortest time to manufacture a product since the early 70's. Should it take twenty years for a good idea to be adopted by healthcare? We would make faster progress if we networked with people from other industries.

A healthcare sales nurse used SOAP notes to write sales reports (Subjective, Objective, Assessment and Plan). As you might recall, SOAP notes are a clinical charting technique used by nurses and physicians. They are also versatile for many other kinds of reports. The sales manager considered SOAP note sales reports to be the best reports he had ever received.

This is the information age. Ideas are valuable and have emerged as the new capital. We should exchange good ideas between nursing, business and education more often.

Look at the big picture

We should enlarge our thinking to include the CEO's perspective as well as our own. Nursing influences marketing opportunities and financial events. In his book, *The Power of Nice*, Robert Shapiro says, "The best way to get what you want is to help the other side get what they want." Nurses should be partners with administration. However, this partnership works only when administration respects nurses as valued professionals.

The following example describes a missed marketing opportunity by hospitals. The first sub-acute units appeared in the 1990's with

a patient population consisting of people who had no place to go: patients not appropriate for home care, long term care or acute hospitalization. Independent sub-acute companies provided a less expensive alternative for complex but stable medical/surgical , rehabilitation and oncology patients. Hospitals eventually created sub-acute or transitional units themselves. However, they could have been first in this market if there had been better communication between CEO's and nurses. Nurses and social workers had experienced frustration for some time trying to find facilities for these patients. With better communication, hospitals would have recognized this situation as an important marketing opportunity and created sub-acute units sooner.

Nurses affect an organization's financial picture because of the size of the nursing budget. Management has constraints from insurers, the government and others. We need to be flexible and willing to cross-train to help administration adapt to rapid changes in census and patient acuity, and to achieve the best utilization of staff. We become more successful when our organization succeeds.

Focus on the future

We say, "We've always done it that way" much too often. A better approach is to start with an open mind and use common sense.

Certain practices, such as healthcare seminar evaluations are also carried to the extreme. We do need measurable education objectives and a goal oriented evaluation process. However, our evaluations are just too long. Nurses must individually evaluate as many as twenty objectives a day to obtain their credits. Evaluations focus on so many details that they miss the intuitive overview. Other industries use simpler course evaluations and achieve good results. We should do the same. The fact that we have always done it that way is no reason to continue such practices.

Welcome difficult challenges

Nurses frequently engage in subtle avoidance behavior. For example, when confronted with problems, we sometimes get bogged down discussing terminology instead of solving the

problem.

The delegation issue is an example of a difficult challenge. Nurses are expected to delegate tasks to other people, some of whom may have had inadequate training. Laws regarding delegation are inconsistent between states adding more confusion.

Many of us have attended seminars explaining the difference between delegating and directing. You delegate to a CNA but direct a medical assistant. However, we haven't made much headway improving the delegating process. We do need to understand legal implications, but shouldn't we also take action to solve the problem?

Most progressive people step out of their comfort zone to achieve results. Change feels uncomfortable at first, but that discomfort is soon neutralized by the satisfaction of creating better practice. Let's use our knowledge and abilities to create realistic solutions to healthcare challenges.

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