In Our Unit

“Help, I Need Somebody. . .”
A Collaborative Approach to Nurses Helping Nurses

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In our unit, we have tackled head on the Act With Intention directive put forth by Beth Hammer, president of the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN). We never want a nurse to leave our unit because no one was available to help with patient care when the help was needed most. We never want a nurse to hesitate to ask a medication-related question because of fear of retaliation. We never want a nurse to leave our unit because he/she felt as if no one was available to help with patient care when he/she needed it most. We never want a nurse to be afraid to ask for help. The reality is that progressive care environments are typically characterized by high volume and high turnover of patients. Time constraints and patients’ rapidly changing conditions, along with the complex nursing care required, can cause frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed among nurses who are striving to provide excellent patient care in a rapidly changing health care environment.

“Everyone seems too busy to help.” “Nurses are becoming frustrated and overwhelmed with patient turnover.” “Some nurses are afraid to ask for help.” How do we combat these sorts of comments on our unit?

We implemented primary partner nursing (PPN) on our progressive critical care unit in an academic, community Magnet hospital, in an effort to improve communication and collaboration through the formation of nursing partnerships.

Our nurses tell us that feeling supported and perceiving that they are able to deliver high-quality nursing care translate into improved patient care and nursing satisfaction. PPN is an initiative of the nursing practice council that establishes a culture of teamwork among all nurses with the common goal of fostering excellence in nursing practice and patient care.

Nursing partners collaborate to facilitate patient care, including admissions, discharges, transfers, diagnostic testing, establishing vascular access, initiating and maintaining infusion therapy, wound care, patient education, and managing patients’ rapidly changing conditions. Partnerships, groups of 2 or 3 registered nurses (RNs), are established on the basis of proximity and experience. The partnerships are

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determined at the beginning of each shift and are shared on the nursing assignment board. New graduate nurses are introduced to PPN during their orientation, where PPN is presented as a support system to guide their developing clinical practice. All nurses rely on PPN as a source of mutual support and consultation to deliver high-quality nursing care. We acknowledge each other publicly by posting thank-you notes on our unit that highlight the contributions that each nurse brings to the partnerships.

PPN has facilitated the culture of teamwork on our unit for more than 2 years. Our nurses tell us that the partnerships are effective and “definitely, PPN has improved patient care.” Survey results revealed that 70% of nurses think that PPN also has improved satisfaction among nurses. “Having an RN ask me, ‘How are your patients? Do you need any help?’ makes me feel supported and creates an environment of teamwork.”

Through surveys and unit meetings, nurses share exemplars of how PPN has influenced their practice. One day, my patient was experiencing respiratory difficulty and was rapidly deteriorating into a rapid response and code situation before being transferred to intensive critical care. The code team attempted for almost an hour to stabilize the patient for transport. I cannot tell you how much I appreciated my partner. She jumped right in and was able to help me care for my patients. I didn’t even have to ask. That’s what is great about PPN: we help each other without even having to ask. Our partnerships have developed to a higher level over time. Knowing another RN ‘has got your back,’ is a great support in providing excellent patient care.

After [I] attempt[ed] to explain to my patient the importance of a lab test [partial thromboplastin time], he still refused. I asked my partner to speak with him. The patient then agreed to have the lab drawn. It was a good thing because his heparin needed to be adjusted twice. I appreciated having a ‘go-to’ person to help.

As a unit leader, I see our newer RNs working with their partners, asking questions, asking for guidance, advocating for their patients . . . nursing partners mentor and coach each other.

Knowing I have a partner to ask for help is important to me. Breaks are important, and we help each other to make sure we each have a chance to relax and rejuvenate off the unit.

PPN is here to stay in our unit and we are excited to share our success with other nursing units. Nursing partnerships can be used by any organization to engage nurses to improve communication and collaboration, which supports the AACN Healthy Work Environment Initiative. PPN also supports the American Nurses Credentialing Center’s Forces of Magnetism by enhancing nurses’ quality of care. So go ahead and ask for help; you will improve nursing satisfaction and patient care! CCN

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