

Work Environment NEWS

GULF COAST HEALTH SERVICES STEERING COMMITTEE

AUTUMN 2006

A Golden Idea Becomes Reality

by Gloria Hanna, Director of PPU and General Nursery, Woman's Hospital of Texas

Last winter I sent a follow-up survey to participants who attended Go for the Gold in May 2005, asking if they had implemented ideas from that conference. This story from Gloria Hanna, Director PPU and General Nursery, at the Woman's Hospital of Texas, is inspiring – and a testament to our program. – Ed

In April 2006, Gloria wrote

I was delighted to hear from you and even happier to share the information you requested. Here at The Woman's Hospital of Texas, we are forever searching for ways to improve collaboration among all our customers. Only recently we were able to reduce our charge nurses' patient load. Then came the question, "Now that I am free, what do I do?" Without guidance, it was easy for these excellent patient care nurses to become caught up in paperwork or become glorified licensed nurse techs, doing everything the staff nurses did not want to do.

After several months of observations and listening to some of the charge nurses asking to have their full load of patients back, I realized we had not given these charge nurses the tools they needed to be successful in the task we were asking them to do. At best, we had given some well-meaning instructions that only served as a source of humiliation when there were less than positive outcomes. These nurses needed ongoing mentoring, direction, and one-on-one time with their manager/director.

I needed help and fast. I pulled down my copy of the Go For The Gold (2005) syllabus. While reading article after article about professionalism and collaboration an idea began to form. I enlisted the help of two other nurse directors and three managers. We discussed how to accomplish our goal and decided on the best method of mentoring and supporting our charge nurses. We presented a seminar not unlike the one you present every year. During this eight-hour day, we were able to bring together several different but connected topics. We each selected and presented the topics and made sure that the information was presented in a format that promoted



interaction from our audience. We succeeded and got that interaction!

Our audience was 26 charge nurses from different nursing disciplines, different shifts, and different size staffs. However, they found that they all had similar challenges and concerns. These nurses were able to offer some possible solutions to their problems or at least commiserate with each other. Our charge nurses are now looking forward to the next session and are encouraged in knowing that by working together they will successfully fulfill their role.

In September, Gloria added to the story:

Yes there is more to the story, I am happy to say. After the initial workshop we noticed a positive difference with our charge nurses. Very quickly thereafter this change trickled down to the staff. It seems that positive actions are contagious! Our CEO, CFO and, of course, our CNO jumped on the band

See **A Golden Idea Becomes Reality**
on page 2

PAGE 2

Creating a Favorable Practice Environment for Nurses

PAGE 3

Go for the Gold 2006:
Promoting Positive Employee Relationships

PAGE 5

Work Environment Survey
GRANT UPDATE

Work Environment NEWS

GULF COAST HEALTH SERVICES STEERING COMMITTEE

A Golden Idea Becomes Reality....continued from page 1

wagon, allowing us to send 23 charge nurses to a one day Charge Nurse Seminar in May 2006. This action by our "Os" sealed the deal. Our charge nurses felt ready and able to take on their new role.

By the end of May, the charges were collaborating on staffing issues, specifically on weekends when staffing is a challenge and management is not in house. They began to take on the interactive roles

of coaching and counseling. Two of the units involved in the transformation have even produced and presented three workshops, which were attended by not only their units but also sister units as well. These were well researched and well accepted. This was a first for us.

Just recently two groups of nurses from two of my units approached me with a problem they were having. I recommended they meet and discuss

their differences, and then if they needed me we would all meet. A month passed and I heard nothing from them. I assumed they had just dropped it, but when I asked one of the nurses, she off-handedly told me they had met with their charge nurses and everything was fine. Sure, we still have some challenges to meet, but the difference now is that our charge nurses feel they are ready for the challenges.

Creating a Favorable Practice Environment for Nurses

By Howard L. Smith, Jacqueline N. Hood, J. Deane Waldman, and Valerie L. Smith

The following article is abstracted from an article in the December 2005 edition of Journal of Nursing Administration.

Despite nursing being a career in which an individual can make a real difference for other people and society, nursing has difficulty attracting new professionals to its ranks. This is attributed to constraints on pay and working conditions; however, inadequate staffing and job stress also create an intolerable practice context that drives nurses out of the profession and undermines efforts to attract replacements. This highly problematic, even dangerous, reality threatens quality of patient care, contributes to a growing shortage of practicing nurses, and substantially raises costs.

Extensive research has studied the determinants of nursing job satisfaction and turnover. Studies cite job stress as a fundamental cause of burnout and turnover, although job dissatisfaction associated with unfulfilled expectations concerning scheduling, pay, and supervision is also considered to be a significant factor leading to turnover. Recent meta-analyses suggest that a favorable practice setting can improve nurses' satisfaction and minimize turnover.

These authors believe that nurse managers need to place more emphasis on building favorable practice environments as a strategy to retain nursing staff and to attain organizational goals such as high quality care at low cost. Their conceptual model predicts that practice context (consisting of job characteristics, management style, service quality orientation or emphasis, compensation, and benefits) affects nurses' attitudes about their practice environment and practice expectations. In turn, these influence nurses' job outcome attitudes (job satisfaction, propensity to leave, job tension, and organizational commitment).

Research was conducted at an academic medical center hospital. Participating nurses were randomly selected from a list of full-time employees (those working 70% of time or higher). Of those approached for the study, 95.3% expressed willingness to participate in an in-depth

structured personal interview lasting approximately one hour. The total sample represented 9.4% of full-time nurses.

A professional interviewer was used to conduct interviews in a comfortable, distraction-free location that was physically distant from their units and conducive to maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.

The study measured the following variables:

1. Practice Environment Characteristics

Job characteristics: creative freedom in the job, authority to handle responsibility, and accuracy and fairness in their job evaluation

Management style: freedom to disagree with a supervisor/manager, acknowledgment of a job well done, respect shown by immediate supervisor/manager, and adequacy of supervisor support

Service quality emphasis: perceptions of how focused and committed their organization is to serving external customers

2. Attitudes Toward Practice Environment

Extent to which their current practice setting meets, exceeds, or falls short of their expectations on graduation from nursing school

Satisfied, very satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with current practice environment

3. Job Outcome Attitudes

Propensity to leave: length of time they wish to stay with the organization, probability that they would return to work for this organization if they had to quit for a while, and desire to continue working with their present employer

Job tension: nine questions measured extent to which they experienced stress or felt bothered about events surrounding their jobs

See **Creating a Favorable Practice Environment for Nurses** on page 3

Organization commitment: 15 questions concerning their loyalty to their organization and intention to maintain an employment contract.

Bearing in mind the limitations of a case study approach, the findings indicate that the practice setting is a critical consideration for developing satisfaction with nursing practice, and ultimately, for improving organizational commitment, job tension, and turnover among nursing staff. Nurses who indicated greater appreciation for their job and their supervisors, as well as those who supported their organization's emphasis on service quality, tended to express that their practice expectations were being met. Characteristics of the job, management style, and service quality had significant impacts on practice satisfaction. Nurses who were satisfied with their practice environment expressed a statistically significant lower propensity to leave their jobs. However, satisfaction with compensation and benefits was not related statistically to satisfaction with the practice setting, leading the authors to conclude that the decision isn't just about money.

The authors suggest that nurse supervisors should do more to acknowledge a job well done and demonstrate respect for non-supervisory nurses and support personnel. They encourage healthcare organizations to promote creative freedom, balance authority with responsibility, and provide fair and accurate performance assessments. To emphasize service quality, healthcare organizations should more aggressively initiate continuous process improvements. Finally, they suggest that nurse managers who have targeted compensation as a key variable affecting nurses' practice satisfaction should consider non-economic factors. Specifically, they can show support for nurses, involve nurses in decision making, assure adequate and fair evaluation practices, provide positive feedback, be respectful, and allow nurses to use creativity on the job.

Go for the Gold 2006 Promoting Positive Employee Relationships

The third learning exchange, **Go for the Gold**, Improving the Work Environment in Gulf Coast Hospital, will be held on Friday, December 8, 2006. This year the program is sponsored by The WorkSource, The Greater Houston Partnership, Rice University, and area hospitals. The project is also funded in part by a grant from the Health Resources Services Administration. The conference will be held at the Rice University Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Management in Houston.

The overall theme of the 2006 conference, "Promoting Positive Employee Relationships" is a critical issue for hospitals today. The theme will be highlighted by engaging and relevant presentations from our two distinguished keynote speakers, presentation and discussion of 15 innovative work environment initiatives, and informal, networking gatherings.

This learning exchange was created to make it easy to find out the why's, how's, and success stories that lead to improving the work environment. Contributions from peers (staff nurses to executives) are the unique and most meaningful aspect of the learning exchange. Participants will hear stories of real actions taken by top performers in area hospitals – actions that range from inexpensive "quickies" to major change efforts. All have been solicited by questions related to Ideal Work Environment practices on the Work Environment Survey and selected by committees of your peers to showcase a variety of the best practices being done locally today! In addition, all practices recommended as improving their work environments by area hospitals will be shared in a notebook given to all participants -- many more practices than can be presented at the conference.

Key Note Addresses:

Communicating to Avoid and Manage Conflict in the Workplace

By Deborah J. Barrett, Ph.D.

Any number of problems can lead to conflict in the workplace, particularly in today's high stress, fast-paced environments. Conflicts caused by personality and cultural differences, power struggles, leadership issues and communication breakdowns can disrupt the organization and create morale and productivity issues. Effective communication can help individuals and organizations avoid conflict and manage it when it does occur. This presentation will focus on the best practices in employee communication and conflict management and provide techniques for individuals to use in one-on-one, team and organizational communications situations.

Participants will hear stories of real actions taken by top performers in area hospitals – actions that range from inexpensive "quickies" to major change efforts.

Deborah J. Barrett, professor of the practice of professional communication at Rice University, has taught and consulted in communication for more than 25 years. She has published articles and presented papers on leadership communication, emotional intelligence, teams, cross-cultural communications, communication ethics, change communication and employee communication. Her book, *Leadership Communication*, was published by McGraw-Hill last year. She is currently continuing her research on cross-cultural employee communication. Dr. Barrett earned her B.A. in English and speech and her M.A. in English from the University of Houston, and her Ph.D. in English from Rice University.

Work Environment NEWS

GULF COAST HEALTH SERVICES STEERING COMMITTEE

Gold for the Gold 2006....continued from page 3

Creating Positive Relationships with Aging Employees

By K. Lynn Wieck, Ph.D.

The senior workforce, those employees nearing retirement age, are the backbone of the hospital employee pool. They bring experience, stability, and commitment to their everyday roles. However, the physical demands and safety issues of hospital work may drive them to seek early retirement where they take their knowledge and experience with them when they leave. Dr. Wieck's research on more than 3,000 mature and experienced nurses from across the nation suggests strategies which may allow hospitals an opportunity to prevent, delay or reverse retirement by many senior health care workers by changing the nature of the work, offering flexible benefits or attending to personal needs. The goal is to offer strategies to foster intergenerational harmony and increased retention in today's workforce.

Lynn Wieck is chief executive officer of a Houston-based company, Management Solutions for Healthcare, and is a nurse consultant for health policy and workforce solutions. She is also the Jacqueline M. Braithwaite professor at the University of Texas at Tyler, where she is involved in the development of an online Ph.D. nursing program. Her research area is nursing workforce issues with a focus on intergenerational harmony. She has studied and published about both the young emerging workforce as well as mature and experienced nurses. Dr. Wieck has published six nursing textbooks which have been translated into five languages and wrote a monthly column for the Houston Chronicle on nursing issues for four years. Her latest book, *Stories for Nurses: Acts of Caring* was released in August 2002 and has received an American Journal of Nursing Book of the Year award. Dr. Wieck is a researcher as well as a national speaker on health workforce issues. She is immediate past-president of the Texas Nurses Association and is a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

Program Highlights:

Deborah Barrett, Ph.D., will present "Communicating to Avoid and Manage Conflict in the Workplace"

K. Lynn Wieck, Ph.D., will present "Creating Positive Relationships with Aging Employees"

Small group, interactive sessions will be offered on five key dimensions of an Ideal Work Environment: professionalism, teamwork and interpersonal communication, staff training and development, environmental factors and economic considerations – each session highlighting how-to's for 3 best practices.

Opportunities to exchange information with hospital staff who share your same work environment challenges or who have implemented practices that achieved improved work environment outcomes

Learning in a fast-paced, uplifting atmosphere

Registration for Go for the Gold

This year, all hospitals in the Houston-Galveston area are invited to participate. To register, visit our on-line registration website: <http://www.gchssc.com/register.asp>. Registrations will be processed in a first come, first served basis.

Who Should Attend

This conference is intended for hospital staff responsible for initiating and implementing initiatives to improve the work environment in their hospitals, such as: chief nursing officers, nurse managers, and staff nurses; chief human resources officers and human resources professionals; quality assurance officers and professionals; hospital administrators; and physician leaders.

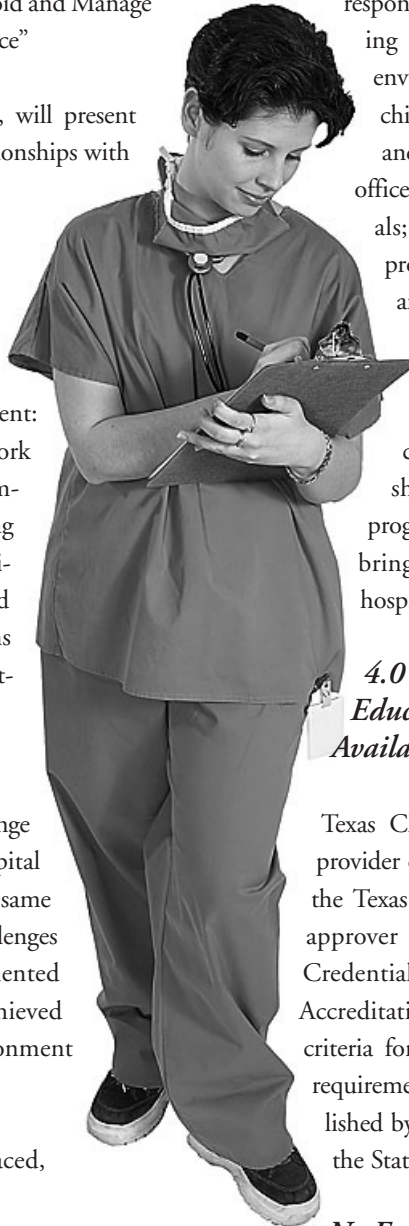
We encourage chief executive officers, chief nursing officers, and chief human Resources officers to share information about this program with staff whom they feel will bring back ideas that benefit their hospitals.

4.0 Continuing Nursing Education Contact Hours Available to RNs

Texas Children's Hospital is an approved provider of continuing nursing education by the Texas Nurses Association, an accredited approver by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation. This activity meets Type I criteria for mandatory continuing education requirements toward re-licensure as established by the Board of Nurse Examiners for the State of Texas.

No Fee for Attendance

The Learning Exchange is offered at no charge. The cost of the program is graciously underwritten by our sponsors and HRSA. Parking is available in the parking garage under the Jones Graduate School of Management for \$9, payable by cash or credit card.



Work Environment Survey UPDATE

Congratulations to us! Last spring, HRSA conducted a Performance Audit that went very well. The team completed their review of our project and outcomes and gave extremely favorable feedback to us in terms of our continuous quality orientation and achievements in meeting grant performance goals. One result of their audit is the renaming of our project, which became the Ideal Hospital Project, recognizing our roots in seeking ideal work environments. We hope that this new name helps distinguish this project from other marketed programs.

The Ideal Hospital Project is off to a busy start this fall! Both hospital enrollment and preparation for Go for the Gold are taking place simultaneously. Hospital enrollment in the project is going well, with most hospitals that participated in the project last year also participating this year; several new hospitals have also enrolled in the project. Likewise, registration for the December 8 Go for the Gold is already nearly at capacity.

The Work Environment Survey has been revised for 2006. A complete review was conducted of all measures based on hospital feedback, HRSA audit feedback, and our current research interests and grant-related information. As a result, some measures were eliminated and new patient outcome and employee safety measures were added. As in last year, the work environment data survey will be conducted separately from the recommended practices survey.

In the Work Environment Survey 2006, a new survey deadline was established for the data entry --- December 15, 2006; this date was selected in order to move the survey deadline away from year-end, which was a source of frustration for some hospitals. There are some extensions being allowed under extenuating circumstances.

If you have any questions regarding the surveys, please contact the Project Director, Donde Batten at dbatten1@houston.rr.com.

Thank you for participating in this project!

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