



ASPAN

American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

Message from the President

Be the Voice: Patient Advocacy and Safety

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It is the morning of surgery, an event that occurs at numerous hospitals around our nation on a daily basis. The admitting nurse asks the patient all of the required preoperative questions. As usual, the morning is hectic and filled with demands that keep the nurse moving at an accelerated pace -- perhaps more rapidly than the nurse feels is safe.

This patient has several questions for the nurse. A lack of understanding regarding what will transpire on this day is heard in the questions asked and is visible in his facial expression. The nurse's assessment alerts her that time must be taken to adequately answer and clarify the questions, but the OR is calling for the patient now. What should this nurse do?

Frontline Advocates

Nurses play an important role in the prevention of errors and promotion of patient safety. As a nurse, one must speak up and speak out for the patient as his or her voice. As nursing professionals, we are guided by practice standards and are subject to federal and state consumer safety laws. In 1999 the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released a report *To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System*. IOM issued the follow-up report in 2001, *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century*.

The IOM reports placed a focus on the quality of healthcare the public is receiving when cared for in health institutions. An important relationship exists between nurses at the bedside and the delivery of patient care. Nursing professionals are "bound by an ethical code to advocate for and protect the patients under their charge."¹ Our patients expect and deserve safe, quality, and competent nursing care.

Nursing advocacy involves being the voice for our patients and it plays a vital role in keeping patients safe as they navigate through the healthcare system. Each day, nurses have opportunities to serve as patient advocates. Yet, competing priorities such as a new medical device, multiple patient assignments, new technology and computerized charting frequently take our attention away from the bedside. Unfortunately, tasks sometimes receive a higher priority than advocating for patients' needs.

Perhaps our healthcare partners are not receptive to what nurses have to say, or they neglect to respond in a timely manner. The bottom line is: nursing's voice must be present to consistently place our patients' needs and safety first. We who have chosen to deliver care to others at their most vulnerable time do so because we care, are compassionate, and desire to make a difference in the lives of patients and families. How do we, as perianesthesia nurses, use our voice to advocate for patients?

Safety Champions

Your ASPAN leaders recognize the need to be active participants in creating a safe environment of care for patients. One of ASPAN's goals is to be the influential force for perianesthesia patient safety, public policy and practice standards. Last April, at the 26th National Conference in Anaheim, your Representative Assembly voted to endorse a Position Statement on Perianesthesia Safety. This position statement identified characteristics that support a culture of safety: communication; advocacy; competency; efficiency/timeliness; and teamwork.

Safety advocacy translates into something tangible at your facility or area of practice. Handoff communication, site verification, medication reconciliation, and having the appropriate staffing levels are just a few areas of concern that we can impact at a local level. Collaboration with and the inclusion of physicians, administrators and other healthcare colleagues regarding issues affecting patient care are important for creating a safe environment for patients.

Every nurse can become involved in work teams, performance improvement projects, committee work, and drafting of policies, procedures or standards. Your presence, active participation, and voice can and does make a difference in the care your patients receive. ASPAN offers many resources to assist you in caring for patients, and your organization is dedicated to the delivery of safe, competent patient care by providing quality education, practice standards and safe practices founded in evidence based research.

Policy and Partnerships

Patient advocacy cannot occur in a vacuum. It must move beyond the bedside. Partnerships can and must be formed with our healthcare partners. Katie Horton is a registered nurse (RN) and Washington, DC health policy advocate. She states, "Successful advocates participate in coalitions of organizations with common policy interests."² ASPAN partners with anesthesia providers, physicians and other nursing colleagues on issues affecting patient safety. ASPAN is an active participant in the Council on Surgical and Perioperative Safety (CSPS). This interdisciplinary group is working together to address core principles that affect patient safety, and I expect that you will continue to hear very exciting news from this group.

Although our circle of patient advocacy begins with a focus on our individual patient, it must extend outward to an understanding of healthcare issues on the state and national levels. Nurses must become politically savvy about healthcare policy and how that policy translates to the care delivered at the bedside. We have a responsibility to advocate for and support legislative programs that will ensure safe, quality driven environments for our patients and their families.

Raising Your Voice

Here are suggestions on how perianesthesia nurses can use our voices to advocate for patients we care for each day:

- Be compassionate and caring while communicating with the patient and his/her family
- Form a partnership with your patient; develop a plan of care for meeting personal needs and ensure the patient is an active participant in his/her care
- Maintain vigilance on behalf of the patient
- Know your ASPAN Standards, and organization/unit policies; incorporate these into practice
- Participate in committees, work teams, and performance improvement projects
- Belong to and be active in your professional nursing organization
- Use your experience, expertise, opinions and voice to advocate for improved healthcare initiatives at the local, state, federal and international levels

Eve Franklin, an RN and state senator from Montana writes: "Despite having spent all my adult professional life tending to the feelings of others, I was not at all confused about where the desire to care needed to change to a commitment to battle and, in the political context, an absolute requirement to fight. In politics, as in nursing, caring means little if you can't deliver; compassion is limited if you don't have the gumption to fight for good outcomes; and kindness is as vacuous as being 'nice' if it doesn't mean beneficent action and advocacy."³

We've all likely experienced that hectic, demanding, and sometimes frightening workplace I described. As perianesthesia nurses, we are positioned at the center of the healthcare delivery system. We have both the privilege and responsibility to create an environment of caring, healing, and safety that patients and their loved ones deserve. So please make safety a priority and take every opportunity you can to advocate for patients. Your voice is wanted and needed. Be the Voice.

REFERENCES

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3. Franklin E. Pilgrim in politics; Unit four case study. In Mason D, Leavitt J, Chaffee M. Policy and Politics in Nursing and Health Care (4th Ed). St. Louis: Saunders, p. 591, 2002.