

"Why Can't We Do It All?" Creation of a Perioperative Flex Team

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Background Information: Two nurses with pre-operative and PACU experience wanted to create an opportunity for cross-training nurses across all phases of perioperative care rather than hiring RN's solely to pre-operative or PACU units. They asked, "Why can't we do it all?"

Objectives of Project: The objectives of this project were to create a team of nurses trained to care for patients in all phases of the perioperative experience except for the OR. These highly flexible and skilled nurses provide care in preanesthesia, phase 1, phase 2, and discharge home. The goal of cross-training was to increase staff satisfaction and provide a flexible work force to fill staffing holes across the perioperative service.

Process of Implementation: We began with a staff survey which explored interest and nursing perceptions of the benefits and deterrents to flex team implementation. Survey results guided development of a proposal presented to perioperative nursing management. We conducted staff interviews, recruiting nurses already within the perioperative service, and initiated a six-month pilot program. We cross-trained two PACU RNs to preop, and one preop RN to PACU. Two RNs leading the group were already cross-trained. We met with management biweekly to assess progress/satisfaction levels.

Statement of Successful Practice: Our pilot project was implemented in October 2020 through April 2021 with five RNs. Anonymous polling of management and flex team RNs provided positive feedback regarding increased nursing satisfaction. The flex team filled most (88%) of posted holes in the first time block it was initiated.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing: Cross-training and creating a perioperative flex team is imperative to provide efficient care and safe staffing ratios, and to increase nursing satisfaction.