



ASPAN

American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

Message from the President

Balance in Practice

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I love precepting new nurses. The activity is empowering yet humbling at the same time. Teaching new nurses is a powerful experience because one's clinical expertise and knowledge-base come together to inspire, support and educate the eager learner. Teaching is also a humbling experience for the same reasons.

Let's compare the act of mentoring to driving a car to the mall. For many of us, the act of driving to the mall is completely second nature. Just stop to ponder, for a moment, the number of steps involved in getting to that destination: find the keys, unlock the car door, put the key into the ignition, and turn the key. Note the sound of the engine running and the amount of fuel. Take another look at the shopping list. Adjust the mirrors and the internal temperature for comfort. Tune into the preferred music station. Put the car in gear. Keep one foot near the brake. Look, listen and look again. Apply pressure to the gas pedal. Feel the evenness of the tires on the pavement. When one considers the multitude of details involved, driving to the mall doesn't seem quite so simple.

The Notion of Balance

For many of us, going to work is a nicely programmed routine or: "a habit or tendency so well-developed and long-practiced that it seems to be done unconsciously."¹ Caring for patients, preparing them for surgery and procedures, or tending to postoperative needs is often second nature. However, the truth is, nurses are in a constant state of seeking balance to best manage the needs of patients, providers, team members and the care delivery unit.

Balance can mean any number of things to a variety of people. What do you associate with the notion of balance? Do you wish for more time with patients and the patients' families? Do you need more leisure time or exercise? Could you benefit from less work, more sleep, or perhaps more success?

A Juggling Metaphor

Juggling is a fitting metaphor for the balancing act between our personal and professional lives.² The image of the juggler resonates in many of us. The first lesson in becoming a good juggler is to understand that this skill takes a good deal of practice. Juggling requires patience, time and a supportive mentor. The second lesson is that, while there are some aspects that require close attention, other aspects are intuitive and happen almost automatically.

The skill of paying attention to some things, while letting others happen instinctively, is a trait of expert nurses. Concentration is important when keeping track of the simultaneous activities, and helps to prioritize actions. The third key to successful juggling is to focus on the parts needing attention (the objects being juggled) and the whole (keeping the objects in the air). Seeing the 'big picture' helps the juggler to focus.

Reflecting on this process, as a nurse, provides affirmation of the enormity of the responsibilities in professional practice. A preoperative nurse does not simply get the patient ready for the operating room. This nurse may review the chart, greet the patient and family, provide introductions and orient the patient to the environment, assess the anxiety level and answer questions while checking the patient's identification based institutional policy. This is barely the beginning of perianesthesia care.

Out of Balance?

Day-to-day nurses are dealing with tremendous responsibilities and finding the juggling metaphor applicable to most of our daily activities. While examining issues related to work-life balance, the Bureau of Labor reported that employees spend a third of the day at work, a third of the day asleep, and a third managing everything else.³ If any of the steps are missed, such as lack of practice, lack of patience or lack of time, the situation can become out of balance.

When driving the car to the mall, you might miss your exit, spill your coffee in your lap, or worse, become involved in a traffic accident due to distraction. When a nurse's work situation is out of balance, the consequence can be chaos: distraction; missed patient assessment cues; wrong drug, wrong dose, and/or wrong patient.

How ASPAN Helps

The major missions of ASPAN include perianesthesia principles of education, research and clinical practice. These three domains weave together the fabric that balances practice. ASPAN education is not simply the dissemination of knowledge, but also the raised awareness of resources and learning responsibilities. ASPAN research is not merely the analysis of data accumulation, but also the liberation of evidence to change and grow safer practice ideals. ASPAN clinical practice is not purely the naming of perianesthesia work, but also the foundation of networking and unity of perianesthesia nurses. Together, these missions, and the work of countless volunteers who support and uphold them, offer a safety net for novice, intermediate and expert nurses.

As the premier specialty perianesthesia nursing organization, ASPAN is ready to define, seek and restore balance. Following the advice of Fulmano,⁴ the ASPAN Board of Directors is working to identify processes that no longer fit its needs and create new processes to help move perianesthesia practice into the future.

Nurses' knowledge of technological advances, healthcare reforms, and innovations of best practices help to plant the seeds of transformation. We will continue to support and mentor each other to polish our craft as master jugglers of perianesthesia nursing education, reapers of perianesthesia science, and providers of excellence in patient care.

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