



ASPAN

American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

Message from the President

Common Threads: The Ties that Bind

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Our nation celebrated its 231st anniversary of independence this year. Our wise, insightful forefathers identified issues that threatened the country's existence. Then, through struggle and determination, they fought for the freedoms we hold so dearly today. It seems fitting to have our country's fight for freedom as the backdrop for this article, because I believe we nurses share common threads with our forefathers that can be compared to current nursing practice.

Threats to Nursing

Each day, we see headlines in the newspaper or flashed across the television that remind us of the issues affecting our practice. Here is one example from my local newspaper: "The Legislature's budget analyst, Elizabeth Hill, issued a report on the state's looming shortage of nurses in May, noting that the University of California, in a study by its San Francisco medical school, forecasts a demand for registered nurses in 2014 that's 40,000 higher than the current forecast for supply."¹

This is very scary news! Although perianesthesia practice settings may vary within our home states and across the nation, common threads, woven around the safe care that we provide for our patients, tie us together. The nursing shortage is just one of many important issues affecting our nursing practice in general, and our specialty practice specifically.

Our goal is to provide the best care possible. Yet, we are presented with significant challenges and obstacles as practitioners. Potential barriers to quality care can include: the ongoing nursing shortage, workplace safety issues, ineffective staffing ratios, mandatory overtime, nursing fatigue, limited availability of nursing faculty/educators, and advanced technology.

While the challenges confronting nursing can be viewed as overwhelming, they also serve as advocacy opportunities to be embraced by individual nurses - and as a specialty nursing organization. Suggestions and ideas for transforming care delivery should not originate in executive offices. Care delivery should be framed by the expert knowledge and daily experience of nursing staff members who work within the healthcare system structure and interact directly with patients and their families.

Voicing Reality

Just as our forefathers spoke up and voiced their opinions, I am suggesting that you do the same. Nurses' knowledge and understanding of factors impacting patient care must reach the individuals occupying boardrooms and legislative offices. As frontline care leaders, we must give voice to detrimental health system processes that need to change, while offering suggestions or solutions to promote effective teamwork practices and provide a healthy work environment.

Perianesthesia nurses occupy a critical role at the point of care delivery. As you look around your workplace, what do you see? Are there specific practice issues that concern you? Is your institution following ASPAN standards for safe staffing, or are staffing patterns jeopardizing nurses' ability to deliver comprehensive care and potentially threatening patient safety and quality outcomes? The reality is - every nurse can address workplace issues and strive to make a difference.

Making a difference requires becoming knowledgeable about your practice and then stepping forward with an informed voice when issues threaten nursing practice or the workplace environment. The ASPAN Standards of Perianesthesia Nursing Practice 2006-2008 is a valuable resource, providing a framework and structure for practice in today's ever-changing healthcare world. The Standards publication defines safe practice for all phases of perianesthesia care and offers numerous useful resources, position statements and competencies to guide and support our specialty practice. Arm yourself; use the Standards to support proactive measures in your workplace.

ASPAN and Advocacy

I am proud to say that ASPAN fully supports your practice as a perianesthesia nurse. ASPAN is involved on the national level, advocating for individual nurses and our specialty to ensure viability for the future of our profession. ASPAN recently partnered with other specialty nursing organizations to promote a national agenda to create, endorse and campaign for healthier work environments.

Numerous questions regarding staffing issues and their related impact on nursing practice are sent to our Clinical Practice Committee. ASPAN leaders, recognizing the importance of advocating for appropriate staffing levels, commissioned the Staffing Strategic Work Team (SWT) to meet last year. The team first reviewed the literature and then set a strategic plan for conducting research on nurse sensitive outcomes and nurse: patient ratios. The Staffing SWT met again in August 2007, with the participation of leading nurse scientists who assisted in evaluation of the research and provided expert opinion on the impact of nursing fatigue and work hours on nurse and patient safety.

An Advocacy SWT was organized this year to focus on advocacy and governmental affairs initiatives. This team has developed an exciting strategic plan that includes: supporting and educating members on how to become effective advocates; offering expertise on issues that affect nursing practice to legislative and policy makers; and increasing the experience, knowledge and visibility of perianesthesia nursing advocacy. More information on this SWT's activities will unfold throughout the year.

Revolutionize Our Practice

We are tied together by a common practice. As I share my vision of advocacy, know that I, alone, cannot shape the future. I am calling you to action, much as our nation's forefathers were called. The passion and energy that nurses consistently demonstrate toward patient care must also be channeled and directed toward improving practice and promoting safe care environments.

I leave you with thoughtful words from writer and political scientist, Dr. John M. Richardson Jr.: "When it comes to the future, there are three kinds of people: those who let it happen, those who make it happen, and those who wonder what happened."² Empowered by knowledge, expertise and concern for patients' welfare, every nurse can support future healthcare solutions through his or her professional involvement. Use your voice to promote safe perianesthesia practice and the future success of our specialty organization.

REFERENCES

1. Walters D. Nurse gap, law school and reality. The Sacramento Bee: A3-Capitol & California, July 2, 2007.
2. John M. Richardson, Jr. quotes. Available at http://thinkexist.com/quotes/john_m_richardson_jr/. Accessed July 8, 2007.