

Holding Patients and Loved Ones Through the Surgical Journey: The Implementation of a Surgical Nurse Liaison Program

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Background Information: In 2018, the Perianesthesia and Operating Room Advisory Council and department leaders identified an opportunity surrounding the improvement of patient experience and communication during the perioperative journey. The 2018 Operating Room Gateway Program who presented the Nurse Liaison role as their Residency project inspired this idea. The Surgical Nurse Liaison role was created as a unique leadership opportunity to facilitate bidirectional communication between perioperative staff and patient/support persons.

Objectives of Project: The purpose of this role was to promote timely progress information to waiting families/support persons of surgical patients. Part time and full time perioperative RNs (from both Perianesthesia and the Operating Room) were selected based on their excellent verbal communication/listening skills, ability to manage ambiguity, empathy, and passion about the patient/family experience.

Process of Implementation: The Surgical Nurse Liaison application period opens in the Fall every year, excluding 2020-2021. Nurses are asked to apply during this period and the selection process is conducted by the current Nurse Liaison cohort. Once selected, the new cohort undergoes a thorough training program, which includes in-services about Patient and Guest Relations, Verbal De-Escalation Techniques, OR and Perianesthesia 101 etiquette, organizational experience standards, and informatics. After the in-service days, the new cohort has several shadow days in the family waiting room with the current nurse liaison staff.

Statement of Successful Practice: Since inception, there have been four total nurse liaison cohorts that have undergone training. This has been a tremendous staff and patient/family satisfier, as reflected in pulse surveys, patient/family experience surveys, and staff surveys. Nurses are able to function in the nurse liaison role as part of their required biweekly commitment and act as champions for their fellow staff as patients progress through the perioperative experience. The nurses are able to support the patient and families members in such a unique way, which adds value and meaning to their professional practice.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing: The Surgical Nurse Liaison role is unique to this entity within the health system. However, there is clear evidence on the benefit of having this role. Our recommendation would be that all perioperative areas should advocate to have someone within the Surgical Nurse Liaison role, as it will have a positive impact on the patient/family/staff experience.