Creating the environment for nursing excellence

It’s time for staff nurses and nurse leaders to help create a work environment that fosters basic nursing care.

By Lillee Gelinas, MSN, RN, FAAN

It’s not easy to define basic nursing care in terms relevant to academia, research, and practice. Yet ensuring the delivery of basic care has never been more important. As Pipe and colleagues wrote in 2012, “As the work of nursing becomes increasingly more complex and significantly more technical…, nurses are beginning to find that the basic nursing interventions that were once the hallmark of good nursing care are being left behind.”

Articulating when basic care is not done, termed “missed” care, has advanced work in this area. In the last 6 years, studies have shown that significant amounts of care are missed in acute care hospitals. Missed care is important not just from a patient safety and quality of care perspective, but also from a business perspective. Hospital reimbursements are reduced or eliminated for acute care services when any one of a common set of complications occurs.

To avoid missed care, staff nurses and nurse leaders must collaborate to create an environment where basic nursing care is a priority. Here are five evidence-based strategies that can help.

1. **Improve collaboration**
   Collaboration needs to occur at all levels, from the bedside to the boardroom. Traditional centralized command and control management structures are ineffective for today’s transparent and ever-demanding healthcare market. We must put structures in place that support rapid, multidirectional collaboration and communication, and patients must be made an integral part of that collaboration. As some have noted, patients want “partnership, equity, accountability, and mutual ownership in their own healthcare decisions and those of their family members.”

2. **Make basic care a priority for staff as well as patients**
   The 2011 report “Through the Eyes of the Workforce” from the National Patient Safety Foundation states, “Workplace safety is inextricably linked to patient safety. Unless caregivers are given the protection, respect, and support they need, they are more likely to make errors, fail to follow safe practices, and not work well in teams.”

   But instead of protection, respect, and support, too often nurses and other healthcare workers experience physical and psychological harm. On-the-job injuries are significantly higher in health care than in other industries. And instead of getting respect, some nurses suffer emotional abuse, bullying, and even threats of physical assault.

   What can be done? Staff and leaders must shape a safety cul-
staff and leaders must shape a safety culture through practices that show safety is a priority.

links nursing care with clinical outcomes, and ensure nurses have time at the bedside to care for patients.

Nurses in this study also classified 7% of their day as “dead waste.” If we could eliminate all of the dead waste and half of the type I waste just from walking and excessive documentation, we’d free up about one-quarter of all nursing hours. And that’s even if we do nothing about the waste in the rest of a nurse’s workday. If properly conducted, redesigning processes and work can improve worker retention.

Forging a partnership
With healthcare reform, new technology, and a solid base of evidence for the powerful influence of nursing care over patient outcomes, the time is ripe for staff nurses and nurse leaders to partner in creating a work environment that fosters solid basic nursing care.

Selected references

Lillie Gelinas is Editor-in-Chief of American Nurse Today.