

A Unique Model of Shared Governance

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Like the aroma of a first-rate cup of coffee, a special blend goes a long way in getting your day off to a good start. The same could be said of working with a team of nurses who blend knowledge, experience, and clinical expertise with passion, dedication, and motivation to empower nursing staff to be their best while elevating the level of care for patients and families with cancer. Such a collaboration can be seen in action by the oncology clinical nurse specialist (CNS) and oncology nurse manager (NM) on the oncology unit at Ocean Medical Center in Brick, NJ.

Collaboration, by definition, is to work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort (American Heritage Dictionary®, 2005). The definition implies that participants are interdependent. Recognizing their interdependence, team members can combine their individual perceptions and skills to synthesize more complex and comprehensive care plans (Forbes & Fitzsimmons, 1993). The American Nurses Association ([ANA], 2003) recognized that high-quality care depends upon collaboration with a common focus, a recognition of each other's expertise, and an appreciation for the skills and knowledge shared across disciplines.

With this type of practice model, the CNS and the NM combine the spheres of management and clinical care to bring about a culture of excellence for nursing staff through role modeling, smart allocation of resources, and the development of standards of excellence. The collaboration capitalizes on the strengths of the CNS and the NM to achieve mutually agreed upon goals for the advancement of oncology nursing practice. In our clinical practice, this approach focuses on professional development and advancement of RNs, shared governance, increased autonomy, and use of evidence-based practice and research to advance the care of patients with cancer.

Environment of Care

In the world of cancer care, practice issues are changing and emerging constantly, including new therapeutic drugs

and devices, reimbursement issues, ways to improve patient and nurse satisfaction, and strategies to decrease staff turnover. The environment calls for effective collaboration between the CNS and the NM to be proactive, use good communication skills to exchange ideas, and provide opportunities for creative thinking to address issues that may arise in the constantly changing practice of oncology.

The collaboration and collegiality resulting from this practice alliance led to the inpatient oncology unit being chosen to be the first unit to pilot test a new nursing model of care at Ocean Medical Center, which is part of Meridian Health. The new model of care (see Figure 1) provides an evolutionary work environment that illustrates the benefits of the CNS and NM collaborative partnership in supporting and energizing oncology nurses to develop their "own special blend." The model focuses on four dimensions of patient-centered care. The dimensions highlight the clinical expertise of the nurse, education, shared governance, and research. The new environment proposes five direct hours of patient care per day, a dedicated CNS for the inpatient oncology unit, access to and utilization of enhanced technology, a clinical ladder, and certification expectations. The intent was to create an environment of excellence by improving the quality of nursing care, which we anticipated would improve efficiency of care and physician and patient satisfaction. In turn, we anticipated that the new environment would improve recruitment and retention of the nursing staff.

Organizational Processes Supportive of Oncology Nurses

To foster personal relationships among staff members, the CNS and NM brainstormed ways to recognize and support oncology nursing staff at all levels. An initial method that staff envisioned was self-scheduling of hours. This change in scheduling was implemented by the NM. Furthermore, an annual celebration for RNs, Oncology Nursing Day, was developed and has been held each year to recognize their accomplishments

and provide support for the patient care challenges they face each day. For example, one year the festivities included a contest encouraging RNs to submit an essay, poem, or drawing with an oncology theme to display their creative skills. The winner of the contest received a one-year membership to the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) and a certificate of achievement. Festivities also included a cake-cutting ceremony and door prizes, such as oncology nursing textbooks, pens, oncology nursing certification review texts, and tote bags donated by the most recent ONS Congress attendees. A different theme is chosen each year based on the national ONS theme for Oncology Nursing Month. A banner is displayed on the unit every year in an effort to share the celebration of oncology nurses throughout the organization. Every other month, a nurse who cared for the largest number of patients receiving chemotherapy during the month is celebrated as "Chemo Queen/King of the Month." The nurse's photo is displayed on a wall on the nursing unit for that month, and he or she receives a recognition certificate and a gift card at a staff meeting.

Patient care assistants also are recognized with an annual appreciation party. A theme such as the "Hawaiian Islands" or "Mardi Gras" sets the tone for the party in appreciation of their team spirit and continued caring and commitment to their patients and the unit. The parties include certificates of appreciation, T-shirts, raffle prizes, pizza, and cake. Other team-building activities include ice cream socials, birthday acknowledgements during staff meetings, and individual recognition of personal and professional accomplishments (e.g., completion of academic degrees, oncology certifications, scholarships, awards).

Staff involvement extends beyond the walls of the institution; many staff members are encouraged to be actively involved in community events, and some take on leadership roles. For example, a staff nurse is involved with her local ONS chapter and took on the role of project manager for an outreach campaign targeting adolescents and tobacco