Teamwork

A move to multidisciplinary charting benefits patients and staff

Are you and your nurses feeling frustrated with documentation at your organization and need some new ideas? One Kansas facility recently impressed the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) with streamlined documentation while at the same time promoting teamwork across departments.

Shawnee Mission Medical Center survived a tough chart review during its February survey, in part due to a documentation system designed to drive staff to work together and consistently coordinate patients’ care plans.

The new documentation forms streamline the following four elements of documentation for all departments to create multidisciplinary charting:

- Admission assessment
- Physical assessment findings
- Plan of care and path
- Discharge education

Each area has a separate form. The assessments vary by department, such as the outpatient clinics and pediatrics unit. The forms help busy staff members prioritize patients’ treatment plans from admission through discharge, says Susan Stark, RN, MSN, CS, ARNP, Shawnee Mission’s neuroclinical nurse specialist. These documents also make it easier for staff to visualize and record the patient’s care process, like fitting pieces of a puzzle together.

“The JCAHO liked the way we connected our documentation,” Stark says. “It helped us with the survey since we could articulate the patient care processes well, which is really important.”

Reward with words

• Ask the nurse into your office just to thank him for work well done; do not discuss any other issues.
• Post a thoughtful thank-you card on the employee’s locker in the break room. If your nurse has helped out other people on the floor, have these individuals write a warm message on the card as well.
• Have a top executive in your department or at your facility call the staff member to thank him for his contributions to the organization.

Take over trying tasks

• Make time in your own schedule and volunteer to do the nurse’s least desirable work task for a day.
• Make plans to have the employee’s car washed during lunch, or arrange for completion of another time-consuming errand.

Teamwork

Charting < p. 1

Simplification and consistency
About four years ago, Shawnee Mission leaders decided to make it easier for nurses to track all of the required assessment screens that range from nutritional screens to the history and physical exams. Leaders also wanted to create a policy to “document by exception,” meaning nurses should focus on describing abnormal assessments and responses.

This proved to be a challenge because nurses vary greatly in how they describe an assessment or a response, Stark says. The hospital also wanted to clearly define care standards so caregivers would document consistently. “By clearly defining assessment parameters, nurses could check a box stating a patient meets the defined assessment,” she says.

The forms offer multiple descriptors by body system to allow nurses to describe the patient variations from the defined assessment.

Ensuring timely referrals
The forms link a patient’s medical history and current health problems with a “problem priority” column that runs along the right-hand side of the template. The problem column prompts nurses to note, for example, if they discover a gastrointestinal (GI) problem when filling out the GI section. This process ensures that caregivers note a problem and alert the appropriate department, such as occupational therapy if the nurse checks off “slurred speech.”

“We guide patient care throughout the hospitalization with the personal problem list,” Stark says. And, if a new problem arises—such as the formation of pressure ulcers during the hospital stay—nurses can modify the outcomes and plan of care by adding interventions.

The challenge with multidisciplinary charting is getting staff members to think differently about documentation, Stark says. It’s not easy to get staff members to document and plan together when they are used to doing it alone. However, working together shortens the time spent planning and documenting, thus reducing patients’ length of stay in the long run.


Time management

Provide an explanation for urgency to minimize wait

When you’re short on time, consider this new time management tip. Add a “because,” or a reason to an urgent request, and you will get more of what you ask for.

A never-ending line of people stand in the check-out line in your facility’s cafeteria. A member of your staff marches right to the front of the line and asks, “Can I cut in?” Twenty percent of the time coworkers grant her permission. Eighty percent of the time fellow employees look at her incredulously and tell her to go to the back of the line.

However, when the nurse asks, “I need to grab lunch but can’t be away from my patient for long, can I cut in?” 80% of the time those farther up in line grant her permission to go before them, and refuse her only 20% of the time. This says a lot about human nature — people like to help. And when you give them a reason to help you, their cooperation multiplies along with your success.

Adapted from: ©2002 Dr. Donald E. Wetmore, PhD, Professional speaker, Productivity Institute, www.balancetime.com.
Communication

Assist overwhelmed nurses with creative communication

Memos, lists of new medications to learn, passwords to remember for technology resources, and constant changes in policies have sent your staff into information overload. How can you best help staff deal with this? Creative communication.

Webster defines communication as “the exchange of ideas, messages, or information.” Nurses’ definition is many times “remind me as often as you need me to remember.” Enhance your communication skills with staff by utilizing more than one resource to communicate important information. Try the following:

- Bulletin boards
- Departmental e-mails
- Newsletters

- Verbal reminders in small groups
- Meetings
- Games such as crossword puzzles, or medication of the week
- Carefully written memos. Run them first by a peer for review, and then post them on different colors of paper. For example:
  - Green for policy
  - Yellow for scheduling
  - Blue for clinical

Adapted from: Manager Tip of the Week, Health Resources Unlimited ©2002 Shelley Cohen, RN, BS, CEN, www.hru.net.

Stress management

Rework negative thoughts to reach lower stress levels

You’ve tried yoga, deep breathing, and hot baths, but nothing seems to lower your stress. Try the following tips for reducing tension, from motivational speaker Suzanne Zoglio, PhD:

1. Carry an index card around for a full day. Every time a self-limiting thought such as “I’ll never get the hang of this new task,” pops into your head, write it down and turn it into a strategy statement such as “I’ll probably get the hang of it if I practice frequently and ask for help.”

2. Turn every complaint (yours or anyone else’s) into a question. Complaints are statements of defeat, while questions beg to be answered and send you on a solution search. For example, if you catch yourself saying, “Everyone’s in a rotten mood today!” (a complaint), turn it into a question: “What can I do to lighten things up?”

3. Watch your language! This is especially important when you talk to yourself. The next time you trip up, notice what you say. “I’m so stupid. I always do that!” Stop right in the middle of the verbal self-abuse, and ask what you would say to a good friend who had just made the same mistake. More likely than not, it would be: “Hey, you did the best you could under the circumstances.”

4. Don’t just say ‘yes’ out of habit. When you find yourself faced with a daunting task and thinking, “I don’t want to, but I really should,” think again. Is the request appropriate? Are you the right person? Can you negotiate a later deadline? If you can’t say, “Yes, I’d be happy to,” and mean it, don’t take it on without a second thought. Be creative and negotiate, or if possible, be tactful and decline.

Adapted from: “Use your head to reduce your stress” by Suzanne Zoglio, a motivational speaker and author of Create A Life That Tickles Your Soul; www.tickleyoursoul.com.
Future nurses need nurse mentors today

By Patricia A. Duclos-Miller, MS, RN, CNA

Part one in a two-part series on mentoring

Many of us can remember our beginnings in nursing. We had aspirations, we were excited, and we looked to become part of the team. However, there were bumps and bruises along the way—especially for those of us who entered the profession before nursing developed mentorship as a way to constructively integrate nurses into the field.

As new graduates, most of us entered the profession and hospital culture in a trial by fire. There was no concept of helping the new graduate; we had to earn our own wings. The difficulty we had adjusting from being a new graduate to staff nurse had to do with the way senior members treated us.

Studies have found that not much has changed for our new nurses. As nurse managers we are in the best position to prevent any “horizontal violence,” a term used to describe peer-to-peer intimidation, by choosing appropriate nurse mentors. We must recognize that new graduates are our future and possibly the salvation of our profession as we know it today. To succeed in nursing, new nurses must make the transition from graduation to the role of professional nurse. Today, nurses who work with graduates can greatly affect new nurses’ professional life.

What is mentorship?
Mentorship is a relationship between two people in which one person with greater rank, experience, or expertise teaches, counsels, guides, and helps the other to develop both professionally and personally. As nurse managers, directors, or nurse executives, we are responsible for the success of every new graduate or new staff nurse. We must all be committed to supporting and practicing mentorship.

What makes a good mentor?
Nurses should choose a good mentor based on the following skills:

• Desire and willingness to help
• Highly refined interpersonal skills
• Competency
• Supportive attitude
• Organization
• Approachable attitude

Administrators should train the mentor in the following:

• Role modeling
• Documentation skills
• Confrontation skills
• Coaching skills
• Other teaching skills

After the mentorship

Once the mentorship period has officially ended, the relationship must continue, though with less intensity, for about two years. Take a look at mentorship models outside of nursing. Employees value this relationship and need the added support to transition into their new role. The mentorship model has demonstrated an increase in morale, retention, and cost savings over the traditional orientation model.

Why?
Nursing faces challenges unparalleled in its history. We must all step up and meet the challenges every day and in any way possible. Good mentoring will play an important role in the survival of our profession.

Save the date!

The Academy of Medical Surgical Nurses will hold its annual conference, “The First Line of Defense” October 17–20, 2002, at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City in Arlington, VA. Program topics include the following:

• Nursing leadership development
• We Band of Angels: The untold story of American nurses trapped on Bataan by the Japanese
• Our wonderful world of nursing

For more program information, go to www.medsurgnurse.org or call 856/256-2323.
Self-scheduling and growth opportunities lower turnover for one multi-hospital system

By Pat Conway-Morana M.Ad., RNC, CNA, CHE, JoEllen Carpenter, RN, MSN, MBA, CNA, and Rhonda Moore, MA

An integrated health care delivery system in southeast Virginia, Carilion Health System faces staffing challenges that depend on specialty areas and hospital location.

An employee opinion survey, exit interviews with departing staff, employee open forums, and information from our systemwide nursing recruitment and retention committee helped the committee and the facility’s executive team understand the top reasons staff members leave the system. These include a nurse’s

• relationship with direct manager
• relationship with coworkers, including physicians
• scheduling issues
• professional recognition and development

Using this information, administrators focused on recruitment and retention efforts, and created several initiatives.

Our self-scheduling team, professional relations council, and career advancement program have proven highly successful.

Self-scheduling
The self-scheduling team surveyed nursing staff to determine schedule preferences.

They analyzed the survey at aggregate and unit-specific levels. Results indicated that Carilion had flexible schedules in terms of variety of shift length, times, and weekends, but many circumstances still existed in which managers maintained control of the schedule.

Administrators developed a toolkit of reference articles, sample policies, and education objectives to provide the manager and staff with information needed for beginning, intermediate, and advanced self-scheduling.

The beginning level requires the manager and staff to analyze the unit’s workflow and define shifts, to develop staffing policies, protocols, and guidelines, and to provide education on productivity measures, such as hours per patient day, nonproductive time, and indirect care.

At the intermediate level, staff members learn negotiation skills and note their schedule preferences on a blank schedule. The manager helps run negotiations over unmet needs.

At the advanced level, staff members conduct all negotiations and problem solving. Employees also cover their own call-ins when they are unable to come into work.

Usually, staff-driven scheduling committees take complete responsibility for scheduling and meeting unit needs.

Administrators hope that all units at Carilion, the largest hospital in the system, will institute beginning self-scheduling by September 2002.

At this time, most units perform beginning self-scheduling, with 33 areas at the intermediate or advanced levels.

Professional Relations Council
Health care professionals do appreciate non-financial rewards. Several initiatives reward nurses with recognition, such as the hospital’s Professional Relations.

The council arranges for recognition of...
Beating the nurse shortage

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professional accomplishments, birthdays and unit celebrations, and holiday events.

The council also addresses relationships with physicians, and provides a forum for physicians and hospital staff members to

• discuss positive interactions and opportunities to improve communication

• discuss information each group needs from the other to improve care

• identify process improvement activities and policy changes which affect communication

Discussion topics include nursing education, RN/LPN role differences, physician credentialing, recruitment and retention initiatives, technology, event reporting and performance improvement, hiring and orientation, and performance management. Initially, the council included nurses and physicians.

The team now encompasses respiratory therapists, pharmacists, and case managers or social workers.

Works in progress include policy development, crafting a code of conduct, and “Outstanding Nurse and Physician” awards.

Career Advancement Program

To address recognition for professional development, we expanded our clinical ladder, the Career Advancement Program. This program

• promotes the professional and economic growth of the nursing staff

• promotes advanced problem solving through voluntary advancement

• recognizes the professional accomplishments of the nursing staff, and contributions to the unit, organization, and community

The ladder has three levels for RNs, with a fourth under development to recognize the baccalaureate prepared nurse. Advancement requires document preparation and review by a peer review board.

The ladder now includes LPNs, nursing assistants, and clinical secretaries, each of which includes two levels. Approximately one-fourth of our RNs have advanced on the ladder.

Program benefits

Carilion staff members now exhibit ownership in recruiting and retaining staff and feel that administrators take their suggestions seriously. As a result, we have seen our vacancy and turnover rates decline and our staff morale and participation increase.

Editor’s note: Morana is senior vice president of nursing services at Carilion Health System in Roanoke, Carpenter is vice president/hospital director at Carilion Franklin Memorial Hospital in Rocky Mount, and Moore is human resources communications consultant at Carilion.

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Positive feedback: Help your nurses bloom

By Lynn Durham, RN

“No gardener has made a rose. When needs are met a rosebush will make roses.”

—Rachael Naomi Remen, MD

When a plant does poorly, it would be unusual to blame the plant. We look to the soil conditions, proper amounts of sunlight, fertilizer, or amount of water. When your intention is for your staff to thrive, the same collaboration with nature is necessary. Have you provided the conditions that encourage your nurses to reach their fullest potential?

The day lily bulbs I had planted with the good intention of beautifying the yard had hardly survived. I wanted them to flourish, so I moved them to a new location where the soil, sun, and water were right. The flowers are now growing. Are you more open to seeing the needs of the plants in your yard than those of your associates at work?

When an employee is asking for positive feedback and attention of some sort, do you withhold it from them? Do you find their neediness annoying? If you had a plant in your yard that required more watering than another would you give it? Most gardeners would seek to understand what is necessary for the particular situation and follow through. Sit back and consider what the people around you might need. What if you were to give it first, before it felt like you were required to do so?

Editor's note: ©2002 Lynn Durham, RN, is a Hampton, NH, well-being coach. She coaches, writes, and presents programs on stress hardiness, relaxation, optimism, and joy. www.lynnndurham.com.

Encourage a nurse to apply!

The American Nephrology Nurses’ Association (ANNA) is offering the Ernestine Lowrie Memorial Fellowship, an award of up to $25,000 annually, to support full- or part-time education in nephrology nursing at the undergraduate or graduate level. The award is renewable for a second year.

Applicants must have a minimum of two years’ clinical practice experience in nephrology settings, and must have been accepted into full-or part-time studies at an accredited educational institution.

The association is also offering the Nephrology Nurse Manager Award to recognize a qualified ANNA member for managerial excellence in the advancement of nephrology nursing. The recipient must be a full, active ANNA member with a minimum of two years experience in nephrology nursing management. Nominators must submit written documentation of the individual's excellence in management style or techniques. Award winners will receive $1,000 and a recognition plaque.

Completed applications are due for both awards October 15, 2002. Go to anna.inurse.com for more information.
Interpreters, waiting room videos help health care professionals understand patient pain

When you and your staff encounter a patient with poor English language skills, put forth your best effort to communicate with the individual. According to a new study by The Commonwealth Fund of New York, a nonprofit organization that surveyed 6,722 minority group members, the threat of lawsuits from minority patients has the potential to skyrocket if doctors and nurses don’t sharpen their communication skills and start meeting people halfway.

Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans are more likely than whites to say they have problems communicating with their health care providers, the fund said. That’s why some nursing schools are adding language training to the mix.

One health care provider, Wendy Funk, MD, completed a four-week Spanish course in May at Wake Forest University’s School of Medicine. “We learned the parts of the body and how to ask questions like, ‘can you describe the pain?’” (¿Puedes describir el daño?) she says.

Getting patients to correctly and quickly describe their pain is vital to good medicine, but many health care facilities in areas with growing Hispanic populations lose time in treating patients because of communication difficulties. “And it’s not just the language barrier,” says Anne Marie Abdelazim, office administrator for Oakdale Medical in Johnson City, NY, where her husband practices cardiology. “Patients who speak perfect English have trouble describing their pain.”

Oakdale Medical hopes to run a video in its waiting room to educate patients on how to better articulate their pain. “It would be a great use of time, especially with those patients who have trouble communicating with us, and those we have trouble understanding,” Abdelazim says.

Barriers to effective communications may include language, cultural traditions and sensitivity, and an inability to read or understand instructions on prescription drug containers. Employees should not hesitate to utilize their organization’s interpreter services when in an incomprehensible situation.

Recruitment

‘Back to the Bedside’ program brings in former nurses

In response to the nursing shortage, facilities nationwide are exploring new nursing staff sources. Administrators at Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas have turned their attention to a largely untouched population of potential new recruits: former nurses.

“What we find here is that nurses who have practiced really get back into it quickly,” says Margaret Martin, MSN, RNC, director of patient care resources and clinical education at Presbyterian, in an interview with the Dallas Morning Tribune. Returning nurses in the hospital’s “Back to the Bedside” program receive classroom instruction and one-on-one training with a preceptor. The facility recently expanded its efforts to meet the worsening shortage, say administrators.

Facilities interested in pursuing former nurses should not expect the process to be as easy as a quick call to a potential candidate. Several states, including Texas, require interested nurses who have been out of practice for the past four years to take a special refresher course. The course can last up to six months, “depending on how long they’ve been out of practice,” says Martin. “It’s a self-paced program.”

One former nurse who has now returned to Presbyterian after pursuing a family and career as a school nurse says that she had her doubts, but enjoys her new role at Presbyterian. “It was sort of a personal challenge,” said Holly Pink, RN, who now works as an RN in the neurology and orthopedic area at the hospital. “It’s made me feel stronger.”

Experts say hospitals in Dallas as well as around the country need to look for more ex-nurses willing to re-enter the field. Former nurses represent a viable pool, a recent U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study indicates. Out of 2.7 million licensed registered nurses in the United States, only 2.2 million work in nursing, the study said.


Staff management

Effective delegation matches the person to the task

With your busy schedule, you often need to delegate some of the unit responsibilities to your nurses. When delegating to employees, consider the skills needed for the task at hand and find the best-suited person for the job:

1. **Duties with deadlines.** Tasks with tight deadlines require employees who can handle pressure. Such jobs are perfect for a nurse who can organize information, decide on strategy, and stick to the plan. A staff member who focuses on what is necessary can offer more than someone who wants to do everything possible.

2. **Responsibilities requiring teamwork.** An individual who can see other people’s perspectives best completes duties requiring cooperation among several individuals or groups. A nurse who can integrate the strengths of everyone involved can contribute more in this area than someone who craves the spotlight.

3. **New methods and strategies.** You may have difficulty delegating tasks that require new approaches. For these jobs, pair up individuals, or form a small committee of nurses who can work together to get the job done.

Adapted from: ©AMACOM, The Rookie Manager, by Joseph T. Straub.
Monthly sessions begin with panel members presenting a brief clinical history of a patient, followed by a discussion about the issues and feelings the team faced while caring for the patient. (The patient’s identity remains confidential throughout the discussion).

The Schwartz Center introduced the rounds at MGH five years ago, and since then, 20 hospitals in five states have adopted the system. According to Stanzler, a key benefit of the forum is the camaraderie it builds among all members of the caregiver team. The sessions create an “equal playing field” and strengthen the sense of a team, which in turn, improves communication between the caregivers and benefits patient care.

Adapted from: Medical Staff Briefing, www.hcpro.com

One Massachusetts hospital has established a program designed to support caregivers, promote teamwork, and improve the relationship between patients and staff.

The Schwartz Center Rounds are an initiative of the Kenneth B. Schwartz Center, an organization housed in Boston’s Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) dedicated to strengthening the relationship between patients and caregivers. Former health care attorney Kenneth B. Schwartz founded the center prior to his death in 1994.

The rounds provide a forum for caregivers from different departments to discuss difficult emotional and social issues they face while caring for patients, and are the center’s “most successful program,” according to Marjorie Stanzler, administrative director at the Schwartz Center.

A planning group that includes nurses, physicians, social workers, and support staff invites panelists to present a topic for the forum, and informs the facilitator (usually someone outside the organization) of the topic. The group meets monthly to evaluate the last rounds and plan for the next one.

‘Rounds’ topics help to promote patient/caregiver understanding

The following are some topics covered by rounds:

• How to deal with a difficult/hostile patient
• How to cope with patient suicide
• What caregivers can do when a patient’s cultural and religious beliefs interfere with the caregiver’s ability to communicate effectively
• How to restore communication between patients and caregivers
• How to deliver bad news

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Adapted from: Medical Staff Briefing, www.hcpro.com
Refining your feedback skills may promote overall staff success

Constructive feedback is essential in helping employees perform well on the job and reach their professional goals. Unfamiliar with their leadership role, some new managers find it difficult at first to provide staff with effective feedback. Consult the following ‘Seven T’s of managerial feedback’ to guide you in your discussions with employees:

1. **Told.** Let your staff know that you will periodically give feedback regarding their performance—through both scheduled performance reviews as well as through spontaneous comments. Though feedback is best received when solicited, at the very least it should be anticipated.

2. **Timely.** You are more likely to reinforce positive behavior and correct negative actions if your feedback closely follows the behavior.

3. **Timed.** Stay sensitive to your employees’ circumstances and readiness for you to approach them. If a nurse has just experienced a loss in her personal life, now is not the time to give her a negative performance review.

4. **Targeted.** Feedback must be specific and kept in the present. Do not bring up comments from previous evaluations.

5. **Tactful.** Be careful to give feedback in a neutral manner so that your nurse does not feel threatened or become defensive.

6. **Truthful.** When speaking with staff, it’s important to be open, honest, and direct about your feelings.

7. **Tuned.** Have your nurse rephrase the feedback you have given in her own words to ensure understanding. Sometimes, individuals have difficulty receiving feedback and can unintentionally distort your message.


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New nurse manager

Refining your feedback skills may promote overall staff success

Constructive feedback is essential in helping employees perform well on the job and reach their professional goals. Unfamiliar with their leadership role, some new managers find it difficult at first to provide staff with effective feedback. Consult the following ‘Seven T’s of managerial feedback’ to guide you in your discussions with employees:

1. **Told.** Let your staff know that you will periodically give feedback regarding their performance—through both scheduled performance reviews as well as through spontaneous comments. Though feedback is best received when solicited, at the very least it should be anticipated.

2. **Timely.** You are more likely to reinforce positive behavior and correct negative actions if your feedback closely follows the behavior.

3. **Timed.** Stay sensitive to your employees’ circumstances and readiness for you to approach them. If a nurse has just experienced a loss in her personal life, now is not the time to give her a negative performance review.

4. **Targeted.** Feedback must be specific and kept in the present. Do not bring up comments from previous evaluations.

5. **Tactful.** Be careful to give feedback in a neutral manner so that your nurse does not feel threatened or become defensive.

6. **Truthful.** When speaking with staff, it’s important to be open, honest, and direct about your feelings.

7. **Tuned.** Have your nurse rephrase the feedback you have given in her own words to ensure understanding. Sometimes, individuals have difficulty receiving feedback and can unintentionally distort your message.

Case study

How to handle a workplace bully

Problem: One of your nurses has made a habit of trying to control other staff members. Her attitude: It’s my way or the highway. Several of your nurses have even gone as far as to call her a bully, and avoid contact with her altogether.

Solution: Bullies always know what’s right, are often self-proclaimed experts on everything, and expect that their every desire will be satisfied immediately. These individuals can become strong unofficial leaders because so many people are afraid to challenge them. Often, they use the fear that they inspire to their own advantage to meet their workplace needs. Educate yourself and your staff on these tips for how to handle a workplace bully:

- Never run from a bully’s attacks. Firmly stand your ground.
- Use body language to show you are not afraid. Stand up if they are sitting, or try to meet with them in your office (your territory).

- Monitor your internal messages to keep cool. Remind yourself that you can handle this person, that you are in charge of your emotions, and that you can affect the outcome.
- Listen carefully to the bully, questioning her carefully and paraphrasing her points.
- Ask her what type of outcome she would like to see emerge from your discussion.
- Listen to yourself speak. Do not be defensive, condescending, or argumentative. You are a role model for staff.

As a manager, you may be tempted to protect the less confident from your unit bully. Don’t do it. Move out of your rescuer role and encourage staff members to use the above strategies for dealing with the aggressive individual.

Work for your own wellness
Self-care continues to be a crucial component of nursing

You opt for three daily mugs of coffee instead of water; grab a cheeseburger and fries for lunch on the fly, and duck out of your evening workout “just this once.” As a nursing professional, you spend your days caring for others. In order to perform well on the job you must also think of your own wellness, says Janet Fontana, RN, MA, principal of Spectrum LifeWorks, a team of stress management and work performance specialists based in Wrentham, MA.

“When you work in a profession in which you give so much emotionally and physically to other people, you have to take time for yourself,” she says. “Self-care is not an option—al activity. Otherwise you’re going to get to a point where you’re not able to take care of other people.”

Fontana says the top wellness issues for most people relate to stress. Stress can directly contribute to high blood pressure, back pain, headaches, allergies, and insomnia, she says. Nurses should adopt healthy strategies to combat stress at work and home. Fontana offers the following wellness tips for nurses:

• Start out simple: use breathing to relieve stress. “One of the greatest tools for us to relieve stress is actually just to use our own breath,” she says. “Learn how to take deep breaths, and to breathe correctly.” When you feel stressed, you usually breathe into your upper chest or hold your breath. Your breath shifts, and your heart rate and blood pressure rise. Your body is on alert and you feel more anxious. Learn how to shift your breathing “down to your belly” and to practice abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing. This helps to slow your heart rate, lower blood pressure, and calm emotions so you can think more clearly.

• Eat right to increase energy. Poor nutrition can lower energy and affect your ability to stay healthy. Don’t underestimate the importance of drinking plenty of water while on the unit. Bring a measurable bottle into work and fill it throughout the day. Talk to your nurse manager about getting a water

Creative wellness tips can improve your mood

Janet Fontana, RN, MA, principal of Spectrum LifeWorks in Wrentham, MA, suggests that nurses get creative in their efforts to promote wellness. Try the following suggestions:

✓ Improve the break room. Work with your manager to find ways to make your break room more appealing. Play soothing music, and bring in fresh flowers and plants. Provide meditation or relaxation tapes and an inexpensive Walkman.

✓ Construct a humor and wellness board. Create two separate boards, one for humor-related articles, cartoons, or quotes, and the other for tips and stories on wellness.

✓ Write about it. Spend 10 minutes writing about your day after work. Keep a gratitude journal and write in it at the end of each day. “I am grateful for this sunny day, my health,” and so on. This will help you to end your day on a positive tone.

✓ Add pleasure to your life. “Research has shown that it’s actually more positive in terms of your health to add pleasurable events to your life then it is to remove negative or stressful ones,” says Fontana. “So adding pleasure has a lot of health benefits.” Try spending time in nature, participating in charitable activities, or owning a pet.

Workplace wellness

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Wellness

• Cooler for the break room if you’re wary of your area’s tap water. Eat healthy snacks such as pretzels of yogurt.

• Work in time for a workout.
  “Exercise is that vehicle for helping to dissipate stress hormones and release physical and mental tension that have accumulated,” says Fontana. Some health care facilities have relationships with nearby health clubs, whereby hospital employees receive discount rates, and benefit from class schedules that cater to their work hours. Some hospitals also bring in instructors to teach fitness classes. Others find space to create mini-gyms within the hospitals.

Stretching is also easy, and equally important to wellness. Think of your pets, says Fontana. What do they do when they get up? They stretch. When you get out of bed, or out of work, remember to stretch to release tension.

• Take a break. Sometimes your schedule may not permit a substantial break. Don’t make that a habit though. “What a difference it made getting off the floor for a full hour,” says Fontana of her days as a registered nurse at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. “When you come back, you can handle things better.”

Work with your nurse manager to look for creative ways for all staff members to take a break. Try to adopt this mind-set: “This might be a busy place to work but we can still have fun. We want to help one another; but we can still take time out of our day to meet our own personal needs.”

• Secure support systems. Make sure that you have a strong support system both in- and outside the workplace. Do things to help develop relationships with fellow nurses. Offer help to others, and when you need it, be open to accepting assistance. Get into the habit of helping first; that may make it easier to accept help. “How do you feel when you help others?” asks Fontana. “Good. By asking other people to help, [you are] providing an opportunity for others to do something good and to feel good about it.”

• Separate work from play. It’s important to develop a regular routine to help transition from work to home, says Fontana. On the drive home, process the events of your day. Pick a certain point in your commute at which you will stop analyzing your day. This way, you can bring closure to the workday, and decrease the amount of work stress that you will bring home with you. When you arrive home, engage in some sort of pleasurable activity to restore energy and give yourself a break. Try these tips:
  - Take a shower. Water cleanses and releases the energy of the day.
  - Change your clothes.
  - Lay on your bed for 15 minutes.
  - Take your dog for a walk.

• Pay attention to your thoughts.
  “Our thoughts are actually a great source of stress for us,” says Fontana. “For most Americans, 70% of our thoughts are negative.” Increase your awareness of negative thoughts. When you find yourself thinking a stressful thought, switch that thought to something more positive. Keep thoughts in the present: “Everything is working out” instead of “everything will work out.”

Don’t be overwhelmed with wellness, she says. Although all strategies are important, “you don’t have to do everything. Start with one or two things that you think that you can add in. Then, you will soon find the energy to try out other tips and round out your wellness plan.

Editor’s note: Fontana is founder and principal of Spectrum LifeWorks. Her company offers onsite workshops and programs and continuing education seminars. Go to www.spectrumlifeworks.com for more information.

Share with Strategies for Today’s Nurse

If you’ve handled a patient problem or workplace dilemma in a unique way, your fellow nurses want to hear about it.

E-mail Assistant Editor Debbie Blumberg at dblumberg@hcpro.com or call 781/639-1872, ext. 3425 with story ideas or tips for coworkers.
A ‘junk food’ diet can hurt your health
Craft healthy eating strategies to improve wellness at work

In 1970, Americans spent $6 billion on fast food. In 2001 that figure jumped to more than $110 billion, writes Eric Schlosser in his best-selling exposé on the fast food industry, Fast Food Nation: The dark side of the all-American meal. According to Schlosser, Americans now spend more money on fast food than on higher education, personal computers, computer software, or new cars. “A generation ago, three quarters of the money used to buy food in the United States was spent to prepare meals at home,” he writes. “Today about half of the money used to buy food is spent at restaurants—mainly at fast food restaurants.”

Our fascination with fast food and junk food has affected not only the pocketbook, but the waistline as well. After a busy day, you may find McDonalds to be a quick and easy alternative to time spent in the kitchen. Grabbing your afternoon candy bar snack from the vending machine down the hall can become an unhealthy habit. When you spend the majority of your time at work, it becomes important to think about healthy eating while on the job.

The Wellness Councils of America (WELCOA), an Omaha, NE–based wellness organization, publishes the monthly magazine Absolute Advantage: The Workplace Wellness. In the April 2002 issue, WELCOA President David Hunnicutt, PhD, offered these strategies for employees interested in developing healthier eating habits while on the job.

1. Talk with your manager about putting healthier foods in your vending machines. Consider affixing descriptive menus to the outside of the machine to indicate good and bad food choices.

2. Provide a daily health and nutrition tip via e-mail. Ask administrators about the possibility of organizing such a program at your facility. If you feel comfortable offering tips on wellness, volunteer to help organize the effort.

3. Hold a cooking class. Find a staff member who enjoys cooking to teach an informal class featuring healthy, easy-to-prepare meals.

4. Highlight success stories. Create a “wall of fame” that showcases your company’s healthiest employees and their secrets to staying fit.

Fed up with the Stairmaster and free weights?
Unique ways to get in shape can help you stick to your workout routine

Your sibling in New York can’t stop raving about her daily yoga class. A cousin in California swears by meditation. Your coworker can’t say enough about her daily “boot camp” fitness class. You’ve heard all the fitness buzzwords, but what exactly are these popular exercises and how can you get involved? Consult the following descriptions to see which programs you could work into your wellness routine:

• Boot camp—This popular fitness program is modeled after the military’s basic training and usually consists of an intense four-week program held outdoors. Depending on the program, the drill sergeant-inspired instructors lead exercises such as short distance running, weight training, obstacle courses, tug-of-war, jumping rope, soccer ball drills, hiking, push-ups, crunches, and sports-related games. The majority of programs meet for an hour each day in the early morning.

Some programs, such as the Women’s Fitness and Wellness boot camp in Rancho Santa Margarita, CA, include nutritional counseling and diet planning as well. This camp lists a 3%-5% reduction in body fat, 5-12 pounds of weight loss, and a 25% improvement in endurance and strength, among others. Patrick “Sarge” Avon, owner of the Rockville, MD–based Sergeant’s Program (www.sarge.com/welcome.old.html), says in his recent book, The Complete Guide to Navy SEAL Fitness, that “the
Stairmaster

unbelievable amount of confidence you will gain in your abilities will change your life.”

• **Dance**—Classes such as salsa and merengue, jazz, tap, or even belly dancing offer a fun, low-impact fitness opportunity. Community centers such as the YMCA or your local adult education center may offer a wide selection of dance options. These courses can also expose you to new music and cultures and introduce you to new faces in your town.

• **Meditation**—Those who practice meditation concentrate on a single thought or physical experience to help relax the body and calm the mind. Participants may focus on their breathing, or on a sound, such as a repeated word or mantra. Most meditative techniques originate in Eastern religious practices and aim to still the mind’s tendency to dwell on the details and demands of daily life. Cardiologists often recommend this method as a way to reduce high blood pressure. For more information, go to my.webmd.com/content/article/1680.51645.

• **Pilates**—This method of strength training focuses on developing core stability while also providing a full-body workout. Instructors emphasize breath, alignment, control, and form, and target the abdominal muscles in each exercise. Pilates can help to flatten and strengthen abs, improve posture, increase flexibility, and relieve stress.

• **Tai chi**—Sometimes called “meditation in motion,” tai chi uses slow, smooth body movements to help relax the body and mind. According to Chinese legend, a Taoist monk originally created tai chi as a self-defense technique that stresses evading blows instead of meeting the opponent’s attack with force. Today, participants go through a series of postures, with each movement flowing into the next, often outside and sometimes to Eastern music. Benefits include improved muscle tone, flexibility, balance, and coordination. For more information on tai chi, go to www.thetaichisite.com/.

• **Yoga**—According to the American Association of Yoga (www.americanyogaassociation.org/contents.html), the techniques of this physical and mental exercise date back more than 5,000 years. “Yoga” means “to join or yoke together,” and unites the body and mind. Three main structures compose yoga: exercise, breathing, and meditation. Exercise and learning to control one’s breathing help to prepare students for meditation, which can help heal everyday stress. The following are two of the most popular types:

  - **Hatha**. Controlled breathing and a variety of yoga postures and stretches help to release tensions, tightness, or stress. This method can also increase strength, balance, coordination, flexibility, and energy levels.
  - **Ashtanga**. Ashtanga is also known as “power yoga” and includes a more rapid and flowing sequence of postures combined with controlled breathing. This style can build strength, flexibility, endurance, and range of motion.

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Get started

Consult these tips to incorporate fun into fitness

- Today’s gyms are adding more and more creative classes to their schedules. If you belong to a gym, consult the calendar to check course offerings. If pickings are slim, ask employees about the possibility of improving selections.
- Yoga and tai chi centers many times offer free trial classes where you can test out the method to see whether it fits your needs.
- Stores such as Best Buy also carry a wide variety of fitness videos, and your local bookstore should have a health and fitness section as well.