My Voice, My Strength

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Ten years ago, I began a journey that showed me how my voice is my strength. This experience has given me the most amazing opportunities and has allowed me to contribute to our professional practice. Professional Shared Governance was a newer concept at my hospital and I was asked to become a member of our Unit-based Council. Being new to the process it was interesting to see the roles of all the members. My manager would sit at the head of the table and listen but it was the chair of the committee, a bedside nurse, who ran the meeting. We discussed unit issues that staff brought to our attention, system goals that were influenced by patient outcomes and value improvement initiatives that focused on quality and safety and infection control. Nurses were suggesting changes in how we cared for our patients by utilizing evidence based practice. We also discussed ways to improve morale, increase certification and have a better work/life balance with improved staffing. This was our strength. Changing the way we practiced to improve the lives of not only our patients but ourselves. During this transitional year, we were tasked to form Unit Practice Councils that mimicked our five System Councils. I became chair of our Professional Nurse Council and over my two-year term, we increased moral by engaging staff and leading with transparency by sharing system goals and initiatives. I decided we needed to showcase our patient outcomes, so I volunteered to assist in writing our application for the AACN Beacon Award. I came up with ways to engage my peers to participate in giving feedback for our application so they too felt they had a voice in our success. We were designated Silver and were so proud of our accomplishment! After my term was over, I became our Unit-based Coordinating Council Chair. During my term, I led our council meetings and oversaw 5-Unit Councils. I aligned the system goals with our unit-based goals and attended our System-wide Value Improvement Team (VIT). This was the pivotal moment that I became seen as a leader in my unit and I realized my voice really was my strength.

The System VIT Council brought together all the department managers and leaders in my hospital to talk about patient outcomes, the patient experience (HCAPS) as well as new initiatives and staffing issues from each area. These meetings were very valuable as I was able to bring all that information back to the unit. This information created a culture of belonging to the organization as a whole. We were not just a small eight-bed ICU but a unit connected to the rest of the system working towards the same goals. My peers would ask questions why we were doing certain initiatives or changing the way we practiced. I always felt that if we were transparent and shared the “why” behind what we do; so many people would be on board with all the changes that seem to come our way in this profession. It’s so much easier to accept change when you know why things are changing.

Last year the Department of Nursing restructured our Shared Governance Model and formed a new council named Workforce Connection in which I am the chair elect. This council was created to fill a void in the Department of Nursing by addressing the need to optimize our staffing plan, improve resources and operations for direct care nurses, improve communication by utilizing true collaboration between nursing and other disciplines, address incivility and evaluate ways to keep nurses close to retirement at the beside. Our biggest goal, staffing, actually turned into a Weekend Staffing Task Force. Each month I would bring back information and updates to our council and ask for feedback. This was an extremely important part of our Task Force as we wanted to make sure that we had System Council input as well as bedside nurses sharing their voice. We completed our work on this project and at the end of January our new weekend staffing rotation was implemented system-wide. This decision was made after 10 months of data collection, review of many weekend rotation models and collaboration with senior leaders throughout our organization. The work we did to standardize weekend rotations not only fixed a gap in weekend staffing but offered a better work/life balance to all nurses within our organization.

If you ever feel like you want to contribute to the way we practice, Professional Shared Governance is an amazing opportunity. This is where I feel my strength comes from and where my voice contributes to our Nursing Profession and how we practice at my organization.

