

## LES ÉVALUATIONS DE RENDEMENT : UNE ACTIVITÉ QUI TOUCHE CHACUN D'ENTRE NOUS

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### RÉSUMÉ

Les évaluations de rendement concernent tout le monde. Les infirmières et infirmiers périopératoires participent souvent à l'orientation de nouveaux employés et jouent le rôle de formateur auprès d'autres apprenants. Chaque infirmière participe également au processus d'évaluation de son propre rendement. Cet article a comme objectif l'examen de formulaires d'évaluation de rendement et de procédures relatives aux entrevues d'évaluation de rendement. Des exemplaires de formulaires d'évaluation de rendement à l'intention des infirmières et infirmiers périopératoires ainsi que des critères de rendement sont inclus. Quelques difficultés potentielles reliées aux évaluations de rendement sont identifiées et l'impact des lois canadiennes sur celles-ci est également discuté.

## PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS IN THE OR: EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

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### ABSTRACT

Performance appraisals affect everyone. Perioperative nurses often participate in staff orientations and act as preceptors for other learners. Nurses also participate in their own performance appraisal process. This article

discusses performance appraisal forms and performance interview processes. Examples of a performance appraisal form design and performance indicators for perioperative nurses are included. Potential problems with performance appraisals are identified and the impact of Canadian law on performance appraisals is discussed.

Performance appraisals affect all perioperative nurses. Perioperative nurses often participate in new staff orientations and act as preceptors for other learners, and, in doing so, become involved in the performance appraisal or review process. Nurses also participate in their own performance appraisal process.

The performance appraisal process has been defined as a structured formal interaction between a subordinate and supervisor, that usually takes the form of a periodic interview in which the work performance of the subordinate is examined and discussed, with a view to identifying weaknesses and strengths as well as opportunities for improvement and skills development.<sup>1</sup> The process is two-way and involves input and feedback from the person whose performance is being evaluated.

Every nurse has a right to know how well they are doing and what can be done to improve job performance. Most nurses want to know what their manager thinks of their work. Well-written job descriptions provide the foundation for building an effective job evaluation process.<sup>2</sup>

Well-written job descriptions and performance appraisals based on standards of patient care and clinical practice are essential for quality patient care in the OR.<sup>2</sup> As more and more patients undergo surgical procedures in day care settings, it becomes increasingly difficult to perform postoperative wound infection surveillance and evaluate the quality of perioperative care.

Complications that occur as a result of care in the OR are most often not reported back to the hospital or to the nurse and are generally treated in a physician's office. Health care

facilities have an obligation to ensure employees effectively reduce risk to patients by providing competent staff to care for the surgical patient. Performance appraisals are recognized as a risk management strategy and play an important part in perioperative risk modification programs.<sup>3</sup>

### USES OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS:

Performance appraisals offer important information for the nurse and the manager. A performance appraisal can be the basis on which administrative decisions are made regarding promotions, transfers, terminations, etc. They are also used to foster employee development. For example, the manager and nurse may jointly develop action plans designed to help the nurse improve through such activities as formal training, academic course work or clinical coaching.<sup>4</sup>

The information from a performance appraisal can also be used to compare a nurse's actual performance to expected standards of care. The appraisal process provides an opportunity to identify different levels of competence; determine the appropriateness of interventions such as education, reassignment or promotion; and support a continuing open communication and strong rapport. It also provides an opportunity to recognize individual performance and provide support for individual needs. Performance appraisals can act as a motivational tool, when used effectively, by providing an opportunity for the nurse to objectively reflect on skill levels. Indirectly, they can also help assess the manager's supervisory skills and effectiveness of his/her leadership style.<sup>4</sup>

### PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS AND THE LAW:

Performance appraisals, and the decisions made based on a performance appraisal (such as terminations), are under the authority of provincial law.<sup>4</sup> An employee may sue an organization over an employment decision that is based on questionable performance appraisal results. Evaluations must be accurate.<sup>3,4</sup> In the terms of many collective agreements, a



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*A unit manager giving a performance appraisal to a perioperative nurse*

grievance can be filed if the nurse disputes the appraisal. Some collective agreements state that written performance appraisals are mandatory and define at least how often they are to occur.<sup>5</sup>

To protect against lawsuits, ratings must be fair, consistent, and based on fair and objective criteria. Consistency between performance objectives and the rating itself is vital. If, for example the appraisal does not match job objectives, and the employee is rated on elements that were not clearly articulated, the rating may be deemed unfair. As long as the rating elements, or indicators, are objective, and not subjective (i.e. not influenced by personal interpretation), the manager will be able to defend the rating that has been challenged. Seeking objectivity as a clear standard will limit the possibility of legal trouble.<sup>3</sup>

Before disciplinary action can be taken, an employee must be made aware of the employer's dissatisfaction and must be given an opportunity to remedy substandard performance. A series of informal meetings, performance appraisals that are not precise, and undocumented verbal reprimands will make it difficult to establish that "progressive discipline" took place. The employer must tell

## PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS (cont.)

the employee, in specific terms, that job performance has not been satisfactory and must be improved or it shall lead to suspension or termination.<sup>4</sup>

Although one can never be completely certain that a performance appraisal system is legally defensible, there are a number of steps that will help ensure that the procedures will be completed in a nondiscriminatory manner:<sup>4,6</sup>

The appraisal should be in writing;

The appraisal should be shared with the employee and the employee should have the opportunity to respond in writing;

There should be a mechanism by which an employee can appeal the results of the performance appraisal;

There should be adequate opportunity to observe the employee's job performance;

Notes on the employee's performance should be kept during the entire evaluation period.

These notes should be shared with the employee during the course of the evaluation period. This process should be documented;

The evaluators should be trained on how to carry out the performance appraisal process, how to complete the form and how to carry out the feedback interview.

### EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS:

There are specific issues to be considered by both employees and managers in regards to achieving fair, and objective performance evaluations.<sup>4</sup>

**From the nurse's perspective some things to consider, that may have a positive impact on a performance appraisal, include:**

1. Do you update your supervisor on your work?
2. Do you ask for clarification when you need it?
3. Do you understand the performance expected of you?
4. Do you track your own progress?



Photo by/par J. Porteous

*Getting the thumbs up!*

5. Were your goals clear at the beginning of the performance period?
6. Do you take responsibility for your performance?
7. Do you receive or request feedback about your performance?

**From a manager's perspective, some things to consider are:**

1. Are the rating factors objective?
2. Do nurses understand what is expected of them?
3. Are you documenting the nurse's performance during the entire rating period?
4. Are you communicating to the nurse about her or his performance during the rating period?
5. Have you received training on implementing the performance appraisal process?
6. Is your appraisal free from extraneous comments and personal opinions?
7. Are you rating performance solely on the basis of skills and abilities?

### POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:

No matter what type of appraisal device is used problems can arise that will lessen the accuracy of the performance rating.<sup>4</sup> If performance

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ratings can be shown to be inaccurate, it will be difficult to defend in a court of law. Potential problems described by Armstrong and Appelbaum (2003) include<sup>4</sup>:

1. Some appraisers tend to overrate the employee's performance. This is called **leniency error**. For example, one appraiser may rate every one of his or his staff as "above average". This creates problems for both the manager and the hospital. Giving a mediocre nurse lenient ratings will make it difficult to later take corrective action such as disciplining her or him.
2. Another difficulty can relate to the length of time during which behaviour is evaluated. Typically, the evaluator recalls recent performance and tends to forget more distant events. As a result, the performance rating reflects what the employee has contributed lately, rather than over the entire evaluation period. This **recency error** can create both legal and motivational problems. Legally, if a disgruntled employee can demonstrate that an annual evaluation actually reflects performance over only the last two or three months, the hospital will have great difficulty defending the validity of the appraisal process. In terms of motivation, recency error demonstrates to all employees that they need only perform at a high level near the time of their performance review.
3. Sometimes an appraiser fails to differentiate between the various performance dimensions, such as job knowledge or communication skills, and assigns ratings on the basis of an overall impression, either positive or negative, held of the employee. This is called **halo error**. In most instances employees have uneven strengths and weaknesses. Thus, it should be relatively uncommon for an employee to receive the same rating on all performance dimensions.
4. The **horns effect** is the reverse of the halo effect. An overall poor rating emerges because a negative performance in one area brings down all the others.<sup>4</sup>

Regular note taking will enable the appraiser to avoid these problems.

### DOCUMENTING PERFORMANCE:

Appraising another person's performance over a considerable period of time is a difficult job. A useful mechanism for increasing the accuracy of performance ratings is to keep notes about behaviour that is out of the ordinary in either a positive or a negative way. Record the name of the employee, date of incident, brief description of the incident, and report what action was taken. The best time to write the note is just after the incident occurs, with the note focusing on the specific behaviours, not an interpretation of them.<sup>2,4</sup> An average note will take only a couple of minutes to complete.

### THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL FORM:

Figure #1 provides an example of the first page of a performance appraisal form for perioperative nurses. The form can have several potential uses. It may prove helpful to have the nurse complete the self-performance appraisal form ahead of time and bring it to the interview. In this way she or he will have the opportunity to be prepared to discuss and compare it with the same tool as the manager has completed. By comparing the same tool both parties can clearly identify any differences and similarities in each other's perspectives and identify issues for discussion.

Individuals should be evaluated based on both general personal attributes as well as behavioural criteria. Fuller identifies desirable personal attributes for success in an operating room environment. They include care and empathy, respect for others, emotional self-control, honesty and ethical behaviour, manual dexterity, organizational skills, concentration, problem-solving skills, and sense of humour.<sup>7</sup> Indicators used to measure personal attributes on a performance appraisal form include those identified in Figure #2.

Behavioural criteria include competencies demonstrated in the clinical area. ORNAC and AORN provide excellent guidelines and standard statements for this focus.<sup>8,9</sup>

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## PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS (cont.)

Competencies would include assessing the patient, planning and implementing care, assisting the anaesthetist, positioning the patient, skin prep, sterile technique and others. Examples of indicators that are used to measure behavioural competency are listed in Figure #3.

The performance appraisal form could also provide space for educational sessions attended, evaluation of last year's goals and goals for professional development in the next year as well as sick time taken during the last year. Space for comments from the nurse, as well as the unit manager, is essential.

### THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INTERVIEW:

It is important that the appraiser, who is usually the OR manager, be well-informed and credible,

in order for the nurse to view the process as accurate and fair.

A key step in a successful performance appraisal process is good planning. Keep in mind what you want to accomplish. Anticipate potential disagreement with some of your ratings; most people see themselves as above average performers and tend to forget their mistakes and recall their accomplishments.<sup>4</sup> Set up the interview with at least two days notice. Be prepared to give specific examples of behaviour to support the ratings. Try to anticipate how the employee will react to the appraisal. By anticipating such a reaction, one can often deal with it effectively with statements such as "Before I made the ratings, I spoke with two other nurses to make sure they were reasonable".

Figure #1 First Page of a Performance Appraisal Document

GENERAL DUTY PERIOPERATIVE NURSE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL	
<input type="checkbox"/> Probationary <input type="checkbox"/> Interim <input type="checkbox"/> Annual/Biannual <input type="checkbox"/> Self	
Name of Employee: _____	
FOR SELF-PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL ONLY:	
Employee's Signature: _____ Date: _____	
FOR PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL BY AN EVALUATOR:	
<b>Employee's Acknowledgment:</b> I have reviewed this document and discussed the contents with the evaluator. My signature means that I have been advised of my performance status, and does not necessarily imply that I agree with the appraisal.	
Employee's Signature: _____ Date: _____	
Appraiser's Signature: _____ Date: _____	
OR Manager's Signature: _____ Date: _____	

Figure #2 Indicators for Personal or Skill Attributes

Please use the following codes to indicate the level of performance demonstrated:	
1. <b>Improvement required:</b> does not meet expectations 2. <b>Novice:</b> requires more learning and experience to demonstrate skill 3. <b>Competent:</b> meets expectations and applies knowledge and skills 4. <b>Expert:</b> exceeds expectations – intuitively adapts to changing situations 5. <b>Not applicable</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Ensures preoperative requirements are met and documented appropriately.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Assesses the patient's physical and emotional status preoperatively.
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Ensures the physical safety of the patient.
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Provides emotional support to the patient and significant others where applicable.
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Completes intraoperative documentation in accordance with the policies.
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Performs surgical count in accordance with policy.
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Cares for specimens as per policy.
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Demonstrates a thorough understanding of sterile technique and aseptic practices.
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Observes the surgical field and anticipates the needs of the surgical team throughout the procedure and responds accordingly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Utilizes tools such as the surgeon's preference card to anticipate requirements for each procedure and responds accordingly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	11. Demonstrates appropriate use and care of instrumentation and equipment.
<input type="checkbox"/>	12. Demonstrates appropriate infection control practices including routine practices.
<input type="checkbox"/>	13. Leaves the theatre stocked and tidy at the end of the shift.
<input type="checkbox"/>	14. Adheres to dress code.

Figure #3 Indicators for Behavioural Attributes

Please use the following codes to indicate the level of performance demonstrated for the following statements:	
1. <b>Meets expectations</b> 2. <b>Improvement required</b> 3. <b>Does not meet expectations</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Maintains a professional demeanor.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Demonstrates respect for hospital property.
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Demonstrates respect for others.
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Keeps others informed appropriately.
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Establishes priorities for nursing actions.
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Responds appropriately to complications and unexpected events.
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Maintains confidentiality and privacy
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Demonstrates a willingness to share knowledge.
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Adheres to scheduled hours of work and rest periods.
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Works with appropriate speed and dexterity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	11. Remains focused on the patient and the surgical team.
<input type="checkbox"/>	12. Expresses humor appropriately.

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## PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS (cont.)

Plan to conduct the interview in a private area free from interruptions.

The interview is more likely to go well if documented behaviours are discussed throughout the evaluation period. Try to establish a problem-solving climate for the interview and focus on how you can work together to improve future performance. Be aware that everyone has his or her own tolerance level for criticism and if pushed beyond that point defensiveness will set in.

It is best to take time to put the nurse at ease in order to facilitate a two-way conversation. Start with small talk and give an overview of the type of information that was used to create the performance rating. Make it clear that the purpose of the performance review is to help the nurse do the best possible job, and state this at the beginning.

Review the ratings with the nurse, citing specific examples of behaviour that resulted in a particular rating. Do this both for low and high ratings. Do not rush through the ratings. Ask for the employee's feeling about the ratings and listen to them, accept them, and respond to them. In order to do this, you must have confidence in your ratings. Do not cut the person off or argue. Together, decide on specific ways in which performance can be strengthened and document the results. Set a date for follow-up.

Should you change a rating if the employee challenges it? If the rating is not accurate, change it, but do not do so during the interview. If the employee challenges a rating, and you believe she or he may have a case, tell the person you need some time to think about it and you will get back to them. When an error occurs, it should be corrected. Most nurses respect a manager who admits a mistake and corrects it. Allowing yourself time to reflect on your ratings will free you from the pressure of making snap, and possibly incorrect, judgements.

### HOW TO PREPARE FOR, AND PARTICIPATE EFFECTIVELY IN, THE INTERVIEW PROCESS:

**Preparation for the performance appraisal or performance review process begins on your first day in the OR:**

Keep notes on your progress;

Find out what the learning objectives are for each new area;

Ask your colleagues for feedback about your skill development on a regular basis, especially in learning situations;

Do not assume that no news is good news;

Seek help if you encounter difficulty learning a new skill;

Ask your employer for a copy of the performance review document, so you know the criteria to be measured; and

Remember that you are only being evaluated on what others see you do and hear you say. Others do not know what you are thinking. Communicate clearly.

**Your employer should give you advance notice of your upcoming performance appraisal or review. To prepare for the interview process:**

Remember, the information on the performance document should not be a surprise;

Prepare and bring a list of your learning goals;

Try to remain objective and open to comments;

Know the terms of your collective agreement in regard to performance appraisals;

You have every right to ask questions, seek clarification, and discuss issues; and

Use this time with your employer to identify learning goals for the future.

### CONCLUSION:

Every perioperative nurse participates in performance appraisal or review processes at some time. Successful performance appraisal interviews are objective, rewarding, interactive

## PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS (cont.)

and fair. When they are conducted comprehensively, confidentially and productively, performance appraisals can work to engage and motivate nurses in their own career development. Well-developed job descriptions and performance appraisals based on standards of patient care and clinical practice provide benefit to both the nurse and the manager and reduce the risk of adverse surgical outcomes and legal consequences.

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