

Basic Principles

By Marlene Hill, RN, CPN(C)

Recently, I attended a wonderful educational session during the American Operating Room Nurses' Congress given by Hugh Gouldthorpe titled "I've Always Looked Up to Giraffes". It is only coincidental that his message is similar to mine. The following material was ready to be submitted to this Journal in March.

A while ago, a talk show host interviewed an author of a small handbook on appropriate manners and proper etiquette. She allowed that, in many areas, Canadians are beginning to display poor manners and stressed that parents and teachers must return to instilling good basic manners in young children and must lead by example. "Please, thank you and excuse me" are fundamental examples of proper manners. Holding doors open for others, giving up a seat for an elderly or pregnant person, listening when others speak to you are also examples of considerate, polite behavior. Perhaps we should return to the concept that a child's inappropriate behavior is "rude" instead of "cute", and taking measures to improve that behavior.

You're probably thinking "What does this have to do with Perioperative nursing?" Please read on!

The Operating Room suite operates/depends on the team concept. Members of the team include the cleaning staff, central supply staff, laundry and right through to medical staff and administrative personnel. Each person has a role to play and everyone must function together like "a well-oiled machine" to complete the daily O.R. schedule effectively and efficiently.

During the run of a busy day in the O.R., if we employ basic principles of good manners and consideration we will serve to decrease the stress level among all of our colleagues, and contribute to an environment of mutual respect and cooperation.

Some examples of these basic principles are:

- Show respect and consideration for each other (everyone is important);
- Recognize people's strengths and capitalize on them;
- Employ good basic manners. People respond more favorably when requests include "please and thank you" rather than demands;
- Develop and practice sound communication skills - verbal, non-verbal and listening;
- Each role should complement and enhance the other. Each person should act responsibly and carry his/her own "load" and not rely on others to fulfill required duties;
- Offer praise and congratulations to members when justified;
- Be accountable for your own errors/short-comings, and never be too proud to apologize if it is called for;
- Recognize and support people's individuality;
- Respect the cultural and spiritual beliefs of others;
- Put aside personal bias while working together even when matters of opinion vary considerably;
- Include an element of fun when possible. In some situations, laughter relieves stress and is beneficial to the team;
- Make allowances for "bad hair days". People cannot function at 100% all the time;



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- Accept constructive criticism and make an effort to improve on problem areas;
- Encourage and support others who endeavour to attain higher levels of education;
- Keep knowledge current and update skills regularly;
- Encourage assertive behavior but discourage aggressive tendencies;
- Administrative personnel should treat all staff fairly and consistently. Favoritism can cause resentment;
- Request, consider, and include staff's input in decision-making and change;
- Schedule an inservice on new equipment before it is placed in the system for use;
- Regularly schedule staff meetings for information sharing; and
- Dispel rumors as soon as possible. The longer a rumor is allowed to spread, the more damage it may create.

This list is a 'tall order' when seen in writing, but not so difficult to follow if you show consideration and treat others as you would like to be treated. Any work setting can exhibit a pleasant or unpleasant atmosphere, depending on the level of cooperation practiced among co-workers.


In an Operating Room setting where things are hectic and busy, these principles are sometimes forgotten. We must all work together to ensure that good manners, common consideration and common sense are used to allow for a more enjoyable and effective work environment.

I hope my message is taken in the spirit intended, and not as a lecture, but as a little reminder that we who pride ourselves on a high level of patient care, be also mindful that the "caring" does not end with the patient. ■



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