

# Professionalism and the O.R. nurse

By Geraldine McEvoy, R.N.

Why is professionalism so important to the operating room nurse today, and what can be done to foster an image that reflects what the operating room nurse truly stands for?

These questions, and the issues implied, were addressed in a presentation at the 23rd Annual Provincial Conference of the Operating Room Nurses Association of Quebec held in Montreal last Fall.

## Understanding professionalism

The first step in presenting oneself as a professional is having a firm understanding of what professionalism is.

Professionalism requires that a discipline possess its own body of knowledge, that it control its own level of entry and qualifications, and that it set its own standards and quality of work.

Professionalism implies such prerequisites as basic education, the pursuit of on-going education, the ability to understand one's own role and the roles of others in the performance of their duties and responsibilities.

Last but not least is image. We must be aware of our image, as it is a reflection of all our preparations, experiences, and values.

## Enriching our image

Mrs. Jeannine Pelland, president of the Order of Nurses of Quebec, said that image needs to be constantly nourished in order to be renewed. It is in this way that our professional image is enriched.

Operating room nurses have been challenged by change. As O.R. nurses, we have been called upon to keep abreast of the latest developments in technology and healthcare. These changes have occurred in a number of areas including:

1. Education
2. The multi-disciplinary approach
3. Research
4. Quality assurance
5. The nurse consultant
6. Continuing education
7. Primary nursing
8. Standard care plans
9. Staff development
10. Nursing calendars
11. Evaluation
12. Central orientation
13. Parallel professionals
14. Nursing grand rounds
15. Problem identification

We must look carefully at the above list and identify those areas where we have to reinforce ourselves collectively and individually on an on-going and regular basis.

Some of the rewards O.R. nurses share with other professionals include:

1. Respect by and for colleagues
2. A fair salary
3. A healthy balance in work and personal life

4. Recognition of achievement and opportunities for growth
5. Supporting our peers and colleagues involved in regional, provincial and national organizations whose efforts are beneficial to the profession
6. On-going education
7. Participation in research
8. Never being satisfied with the status quo

## Role perceptions

What approach is to be taken if one is to successfully present oneself as a professional?

In answering this question, we must stress the importance of setting an ultimate goal.

We must be very clear (in the professional perception of our role), otherwise frustration, conflict of interest and disintegration will occur. We must know not only our own roles, but those of others in order to have a reliable frame of reference. We must experiment, keep searching and attempt to direct ourselves towards a positive professional potential... and we must be committed to the nursing process in order to be more effective in our role.

In order to do this efficiently and effectively, the nurse must do all the right things, as we are doing all things right, using the nursing process:

- Assess well
- Plan with thought and care
- Implement and/or intervene as required
- Review often and have on-going evaluation.

## Professional development

Karen Zander in her article "*The nurse as a professional gaining the respect we deserve*," (January/February, 1985, Nursing Life), states that the nurse must first overcome three unprofessional characteristics:

1. Passivity
2. Low self-esteem, and
3. Poor unit organization

She goes on to say that:

## Learning = Education

Take a closer look at the connection between learning and being professional, she said. We should never assume that we will learn something if we happen to be at the right place at the right time. We must make learning and teaching our

priorities. Furthermore, she states, sharing information is the basis of other professions.

Zander went on to mention two individual strategies which are easily implemented and which will spread knowledge and upgrade the profession:

1. Finding a mentor
2. Being a resource for other nurses

In other words, operating room nurses must share their knowledge, support their colleagues, and upgrade their profession.

To examine your contributions toward your profession and to find out if you share your expertise and support your colleagues, ask yourself these questions:

## Do you:

- Accept individual responsibility and accountability for nursing interventions and their results?
- Share responsibility for patients by collaborating and consulting with team members?
- Initiate and/or participate in change when required to improve quality of care?
- Participate in activities for keeping yourself informed about new knowledge and nursing roles?
- Initiate and/or participate in activities, discussions, and projects which will extend the knowledge needed to improve the quality of care?

Our nursing environment is one of tradition and history. We have so much to give and so very much to gain. This giving and gaining, I would say, literally promotes a professional bonding, thereby creating a oneness or wholeness in giving professional nursing care.

## Role modelling

How do we role model this professional identity in the O.R.? The best way we can role model is:

- act competently
- adhere to professional standards
- be assertive
- develop the ability to set priorities
- be responsible and accountable
- show enthusiasm
- develop writing skills
- be active in committees, i.e., QA, research, etc.
- develop a business-like, professional attitude,

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i.e., 'this is not just a job, it's a professional career.'

We must fully realize as professional nurses that the basis of our practice is scientific knowledge. Thus, we must exercise the right of professional judgement in decision making at any and every opportunity.

## A changing system

In the operating room, problems will always be encountered. Nurses will become more apprehensive as health care and the role of nursing in the health care system keeps changing.

Nor is nursing projected as a powerful and self-governing body. This is partly due to our on-going internal struggle for recognition. We are insecure, guarded, overly polite, watchful and mistrusting. We hesitate too often to transmit the wealth of O.R. experience and expertise we have. We are thus abdicating our right to active participation in the surgical intervention of the patient. We are too passive in the operating theatres. Remember, you are the patient's best advocate, speak up and act as a check and balance to ensure quality nursing care.

We must be aware that we are being misused if we are restricted to the carrying out of medical orders rather than the professional nursing role that prepared us initially.

We must use our power by gaining access to the information, resources and people who have influence on our health care system.

According to the McGill Model of Nursing (Gottlieb/Rowat):

Nursing is not 'setting-specific'. It occurs wherever there is a client.

In other words, the McGill Model emphasizes family and environment as a single context and the nurse as a collaborator. It emphasizes health behavior as a learned behavior.

## Collaboration

Nursing in the operating room occurs whenever there is a surgical patient who comes to our area for whatever procedure. The nurses in the O.R. must act as a collaborator to provide quality nursing care with the emphasis on wellness.

Collaboration is the most significant indicator of the evolution of professionalism in nursing. It is absolutely essential in the O.R., as we move toward perioperative nursing and that of primary nursing practice on our wards.

The sharing of responsibility (through collaboration) by means of negotiation with nursing colleagues is an absolute must if we are to say that we provide quality nursing care in our hospitals.

## Pursuit of excellence

All professionals who are top performers and in the upper echelon of their chosen careers, have, without exception, begun with a clear, conscious decision to be the best. This commitment to excellence quickly becomes the central focus in their personal as well as professional lives.

Excellence, or continued outstanding performance, doesn't just happen over a period of time. Excellence comes about only as a result of constant, vigilant striving to improve in all areas, economically, socially, politically.

## Deterents

The greatest deterrents to excellence are complacency and self-satisfaction. The path is wide-open and down hill. We start by not thinking or caring, by being content with poor or mediocre performances. We make excuses and rationalize about 'hit and miss' performances.

But, there is another path to choose from. This path implies that you are a winner, a champion.

As you grasp the attitude of being a winner, a change will appear in your character in a positive, constructive and enthusiastic way. You become in charge of your future and, with a feeling of excitement and pleasure, you grow, develop, and accomplish many new tasks and skills. Suddenly you realize that you possess the key to self-motivation. You now accomplish goals which were, until now, completely out of your grasp.

## Stages of development

Achieving success as a professional nurse must be well planned. How well you implement the intent of any plan will determine if the outcome will be a success or failure.

Consider the following as a guide to a better understanding of the stages of development one must go through or experience:

### 1. Immediacy:

Do I love my work, or am I just putting in time? Maybe I can wait until something better comes along. Better still, when that nurse leaves, I'll take her place and be just as professional.

## 2. Reading skills:

Begin a do-it-yourself project of personal development. Try reading about your profession at least 30 minutes a day - every day. Seek out the best books on nursing available and begin by learning everything expected in the O.R. field. Try to apply, on a daily basis, one new skill, one new way of doing and planning professional care.

## 3. Listening skills

Try listening to audio cassettes while you drive to work. There are numerous subjects available, and if not accessible, find out where the last O.R. conference was. Most conference agendas are taped.

## 4. Invest in yourself

Invest approximately five percent of your annual income into your most valuable asset - yourself. Don't waste your professional life learning by trial and error. Pay for a seminar, workshop or a conference. They are well listed in the various nursing journals, especially the *Canadian Operating Room Nursing Journal*.

## 5. Social

Watch the company you keep. Associate with winners: positive, optimistic, upbeat people with goals, purpose and direction to their lives. Observe top people in your professional group and seek them out. Ask their advice on books, tapes, and courses for on-going professional development. Watch people in the upper echelons. Note how they dress and how they adhere to dress code policy.

Observe the way they utilize their time and the way they treat their nursing colleagues.

Pattern yourself after the people you admire most. You will become like them, especially their positive, success-oriented and professional manner.

## 6. Health

Guard your health. Enthusiasm is one of the vital ingredients if one is to be in top form. This important and observable attribute is possible only when you are well rested and in good physical shape.

Get enough sleep. You can't nurse properly if you are not well rested. Start your day with a nutritious breakfast. Avoid poor eating habits. Remember, you are a professional role model. Ideally, exercise at least three times a week. Exercise develops the stamina for your long working hours.

## 7. Communication skills:

Start by investing in a good nursing/medical dictionary. Continually improve your vocabulary. It

is an inexpensive and easily acquired skill, and it will be appreciated universally. It will develop your confidence, your self-esteem and it will be well utilized when writing and speaking in public.

## Conclusion

Collegiality is a critical factor in achieving the goals of respect and trust. As well, the ability to share and defer judgments are contingent on collegiality. This is essential if we are to reach the highest level of professional behaviour in the operating room. ■

## About the author

Geraldine McEvoy, R.N., is Clinical Instructor Operating Room, Montreal Children's Hospital. She received her diploma from the Sudbury General Hospital and is presently studying for her B.A. at Concordia University. She is co-president of the Operating Room Nurses Association of Quebec.



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## Education

# Promoting OR education

## The need is now!

By Joan Donald, R.N., B.Sc.N., M.A.

Probably no field of nursing has been as bombarded by the technologic and pharmacologic explosion as that of operating room nursing. In order to cope, our educational base has had to encompass many subjects. As never before, in order to meet the challenges of the future, we must be prepared. Education, an essential, on-going pursuit for all of us, prevents us from clinging to the past. At the same time, it allows us to embrace the future.

## Basic nursing education

During our basic nursing education programs we were taught various skills and gained a practical and clinical knowledge base. We were taught the importance of adequate patient assessment as applied to the nursing process, and we all know the value of patient teaching. How we communicate has become as important as when and to whom we communicate. As members of the operating room team, the techniques we have been taught enhance our participation and role, a role that is integral to the providing of the best patient care possible.

## University education

Because of the pharmaco-technological revolution in medicine and health care, I am convinced that nursing is ready to move ahead and plan, organize and participate in the transition to university-based education. Toward this end, we desperately need standardization of nursing education.

Nursing graduates from all types of programs are required to write a standard registration exam. Should they not, then, be educated with a standard curriculum in a standard program?

As Baumgart and Larson noted in a published discussion about the future of nursing in Canada...

*"As the only major health occupation which has not standardized entry qualifications and required a university degree for its basic preparation, nursing is in a disadvantaged position."* (1)

Whether we like to admit it or not, we have to meet our colleagues on the same level. University credentials serve to enhance nursing power, particularly when negotiating with other power groups. We have a responsibility to be prepared for the future and ensure that we have input into what any nursing education program will contain. More importantly, now is the time to make our views known and to influence the contents of nursing education at the university level.

## The O.R. experience

The Operating Room Nurses Association of Canada feels that the basic nursing education program must include operating room experience. No other area of the hospital provides the opportunity for learning aseptic technique, anatomy and physiology, pharmacology in action, and on and on the list goes. There is no better educational set-