GUEST EDITORIAL

"Request denied"

The frustration and disappointment of not being given time to go to a conference, particularly of your nursing specialty, is real. There are many reasons why time away is denied, but there may be ways to strategize your ask of management, which enhance your position and increase your chances of a positive answer.

This article looks at ways to approach your management team that may help you achieve your goal of attending our conference.

Join ORNAC. ORNAC, the Operating Room Nurses Association of Canada, offers member rates with significant dollar savings. Early bird rates make those savings even greater. The very minimal member rate to join ORNAC also allows you to attend webinars, join committees, and network with other perioperative nurses. You can "pick each other's brains," so to speak, to see what has worked for funding and getting time away.

Plant Seeds. Once the conference theme is determined by ORNAC, you can identify the seeds to be sown. ORNAC sends out information that can be shared and their website is regularly updated. Nurture these seeds; give them chance to grow in the mind of your management team. Send all the conference information to your managers as soon as it becomes available along with your reasons why this is important to your organization, not just you.

Know Your Audience. When addressing a request to the various institutions, the most important thing to know is what drives them, what their public mission, vision, and values statements are. Mission, vision, and values statements are derived from the expectations of the public, via the institution's board of directors, about what is considered as the institution's mandate for providing care. These statements may be useful to your cause.

Types of organizations vary with the services offered. For example, throughout the country you may find anything from full-serve acute care trauma or academic centres to standalone surgicentres. Again, know your audience.

Academic teaching centres, usually associated with a college or university, often have continuing education written into their mission, vision, and value statements. They encourage continuous professional development (CPD), and often they provide inhouse educational sessions, and a learning management system online for mandatory learnings (i.e., safety courses) and general courses required for employees. Use these to your advantage. While they offer courses in general, they may not be offering anything in specific to your specialty. If they offer education in your specialty during working hours, look at who is providing this material? Are they industry reps informing you of new products being brought into your operating room (OR), or are they nurses bringing that aspect of nursing, the perioperative part, to you? Chances are they are heavy on one and light on the other. These settings also have a variety of nursing roles, such as educators, enhanced practice nurses, advanced practice nurses, researchers, or teachers from the college or university. Here is a good article to read and share with your colleagues and management: **10 Reasons Why Attending Conferences Benefits Students - Omics tutorials**.

Community hospitals are usually not associated with a post-secondary institution; however, again you should be aware of the mission, vision, and values they represent. Do they value patient safety, fiscal responsibility, etc.? What are they currently offering in terms of CPD? Leverage their statements just as you would for an academic teaching centre.

Stand alone Surgicentres and Private Clinics also have requirements to maintain services and provide best practices. They pay overhead and insurance and it is vital for their continuation to know that the professionals they employ are competent and up to date.

Highlight Accreditation and Certification Ties. What does your regulatory body require of you annually to maintain competence and grant license renewal? Most regulatory bodies require some form of quality assurance program to monitor continued competence in practice. How can you leverage this requirement into achieving continued professional development, and therefore the competence that attending a nursing conference in your specialty can provide? Essentially, your licence is what keeps you in the position, and it keeps management in a position to run their ORs. If the conference offers continuing education credits or aligns with professional certification requirements, emphasize how attendance keeps the team compliant with best practices.

Staff retention also plays a part here. Failure to be able to retain your competence through lack of CPD may not keep you in the organization, albeit if your organization is "the only game in town" there may not be a choice, but this will impact management's ability to keep ORs running. Patient needs in the form of surgical waitlists continue to grow, so organizations depend on competent, *available* professionals to provide the needed specialty services. Be prepared to answer why closing an OR for staff to attend is a significant recruitment and retention strategy. It is always a positive for perioperative nurses new to a town or city to know that CPD is valued, and once you are practising to know that the organization continues this commitment to retain staff.

Risk Management. Does your organization have a risk management team, and who is on it? What do they expect from you regarding CPD? Ask them. If you have a Professional Practice leader, they are part of risk management; get to know them and how they can help you achieve your goal of continuing professional development. Who is your hospital's insurer? The Healthcare Insurance Reciprocal of Canada (HIROC), is a hospital insurance program. Their website includes risk management resources with specific tools related to OR safety. **Risk Management | Healthcare Insurance Reciprocal of Canada**. As they state under Risk Management, if your organization is insured with HIROC, the OR management must complete a survey annually to ensure compliance with the expectations of the "policy". These expectations may be leveraged to your advantage, as a "competent" workforce is essential for patient care, patient and staff safety, and your organization's insurance premiums!

Build a Business Case. Use the tools of the business environment to facilitate and enhance your submissions. I have a motto of, "the business of perioperative nursing is every perioperative nurse's business". Perioperative nurses are driven by a holistic care model and are usually not informed on the business side of healthcare. Senior leadership may not hold backgrounds in nursing, but they understand business. Human resources, budgets, client satisfaction, are all aspects of the business that impact their work and yours. While I am not suggesting that you become cognizant in all aspects of healthcare business, it does help to understand what drives those in management positions and may enhance your chances of approval when they recognize business tools and understand what they mean. **Build a Business Case for Your Nursing Professional Development Initiative [E-Book] | Relias**. You and management need to work together to meet the expectations of the organization. Gather evidence that shows how attending the conference directly benefits patient care, improves efficiency, and even saves costs. Use specific examples, new techniques or best practices that are proven to reduce surgical complications or improve workflow. **Tips on making the business case**. Internet searches provide many examples of business case templates that you can use to present your evidence.

Explore Alternative Funding Sources. If cost is a concern, and you will know this if you are aware of the business side, look into professional organizations, grants, or other hospital budgets. Does your organization have a separate educational budget that might cover attendance costs?

Leverage Testimonials. If other hospitals or healthcare organizations send their perioperative staff to conferences, compile testimonials or success stories that highlight the impact of attending. Peer validation can be powerful.

Engage Other Stakeholders. If surgeons, anaesthesiologists, and other department leaders support staff attending, their advocacy might help your cause.

Propose a Compromise. If full attendance isn't an option, perhaps it might be possible to send one or two nurses, or have individuals pick topics that enhance your specialty's body of knowledge and attend those sessions on a per diem basis, if the conference is in your town or city. If the conference requires travel and accommodation, offer to bring back key insights to share with the team through inhouse training or workshops.

Each of these strategies may be used individually or combined to put a package together. If you are a group looking to attend, each member of the group should be participating in creating the package so answers to questions from management can be consistent. These strategies are by no means comprehensive on the topic of conference attendance, but at least, I believe, they may give you a start on your way of thinking about your approach for the next opportunity!

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