

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF PERIOPERATIVE NURSING IN AUSTRALIA

# ACORN

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

# Transformational leadership: learning to share the vision

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In the contemporary world of the health care environment, perioperative nurses face similar challenges in providing patient care and dealing with workplace issues whether they work in a small operating room or a large operating suite. The similarities in our problems are distinct, demanding innovation and enthusiasm in strategic responses from our specialty.

Turmoil in the health care system in the past decade has not been very conducive to the development of a positive nurse work environment tuned to the delivery of high quality care. Clinical care delivery in hospitals is affected by restructuring and reengineering and nursing resources are unfortunately often one of the prime targets in these dynamics. As a consequence of these circumstances, studies indicate that nurses are increasingly dissatisfied with working conditions, with perceptions from both patients and nurses suggesting that there is deterioration in the quality of care<sup>1</sup>.

Creating a milieu in which healthcare is delivered in a safe manner requires nurses who can transform the environment and the culture of healthcare environments<sup>2</sup>. Hence, as perioperative nurses, we need to question to how we can meet these challenges and accomplish transformational change to create an organisation that is supportive to staff and that provides quality patient care. Perhaps the answer lies with leadership but, more importantly, transformational leadership. Research shows transformational leadership emergences as a leadership style better suited for unsettled and uncertain environments requiring change, development, initiative and creativity<sup>3,4</sup>.

The essence of transformational leadership is inspiring commitment to achieve the vision of a preferred future. This leadership style contrasts to the 'top-down', 'get things done', 'raised in the army', creativity-stifling old fashioned management style so typical of hospital environments<sup>5</sup>. People are the most important resource of an organisation and transformational nursing leaders recognise that building relationships among employees and departments is an essential component to transforming a work environment.

Transformational leaders create supportive contexts of shared responsibility that lead to new ways of knowing<sup>5,6</sup>. They are charismatic to their employees and thus inspire, energise and intellectually stimulate them to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group. Attaining charisma in the eyes of one's employees is central to succeeding as a transformational leader. Charismatic leaders have great influence. Employees want to identify with them, and they have a high degree of trust and confidence in them. Furthermore, increasing transformational leadership within the organisation has been determined to be the most effective to control or influence most variables that positively impact upon recruitment

and retention<sup>7</sup>. Nurses are likely to be attracted to and remain in an organisation whose manager is charismatic and enjoys an image as a confident, successful, optimistic, dynamic leader.

Transformational leaders show individualised consideration by giving attention to the particular development needs of each of their employees. Employees' jobs are designed with those needs in mind, as well as the needs of the organisation. For example, one employee may need experience in working in a particular surgical specialty. Another may need an opportunity to reinforce what she/he has learned in an education program. Their transformational leader assigns them tasks accordingly. In so doing, it provides a climate in which nurses are valued, increases job satisfaction and promotes organisational commitment and professionalism.

Competent perioperative nursing practice incorporates and merits the best leadership each of us can enact. Continuous change is to be expected and is essential to maintaining, reforming or transforming practice and systems in order to advance quality and improved productivity. Shaping and enabling change are predicated on skills of seeing emerging trends, putting meaning to and linking the trends relevant to improving healthcare, and translating such insights into creation of novel and enhanced systems of care that warrant testing. This is the foundation for ensuring for patients excellent and functioning organisations<sup>8</sup>.

In perioperative nursing, there is a need for vision; leaders are positioned to enliven a collective sense of nursing that sustains a professional connection to the patient. This can inform practice and guide the contribution and involvement of perioperative nurses in their values and beliefs amidst pervasive organisational change<sup>9</sup>. Leadership is not about power or position, but the power of positive influence regardless of position. When one teaches novice perioperative nurses to care for surgical patients, one is engaging one's power of positive influence, i.e. enacting leadership. Positive influential behaviours emanate from a transformational leadership mindset that can be advantageous no matter where or how nursing is practised. Therefore, in our everyday practice, all perioperative nurses from novice to expert would do well to think about transformational leadership skills and how to continually develop them<sup>8</sup>.

Transformational leadership, nevertheless, is not a panacea. However, when perioperative nurses are faced with organisations in which arise problems, rapid changes and uncertainties, when products are born, live and die within the span of a few years, and/or when current technology can become obsolete before it is fully depreciated, then transformational leadership needs to be fostered at all levels<sup>10</sup>.

Transformational leadership has the power to produce future generations of successful leaders who, in concert with others, have the ability to create effective solutions to some of the professions' most pressing issues<sup>11</sup>. This is evident in the articles presented in this edition of the journal in which areas are discussed such as elements of the perioperative culture that influence nurses' resilience, the impact of technological changes in surgery and the management of surgery following a hurricane in Canada. Through information provided by these authors, we are able to critically reflect, learn and, where appropriate, transform the environment to meet the needs of nurses.

There are many issues that influence and impact upon the profession's evolving practice, therefore we need leaders that cause us to rethink the concepts we have of what it means to research, to educate and to manage, and consider how we enact roles and functions<sup>12</sup>. As perioperative nurses, we must take the lead in providing direction that is required in seemingly rudderless times, to band together, become transformative and empowering leaders, to meet nursing's challenges, adopt new paradigms, and advance the culture of our specialty.

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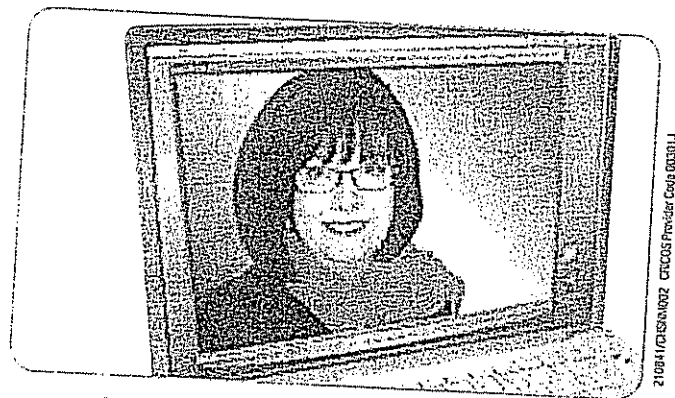
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