Hospital discovers pets are a patient's best friend

by Elaine Biornás

Our staff believes in the importance of emotional support and its role in the healing process. There is a growing body of scientific evidence suggesting that pets are often an important source of support to their owners, especially in times of stress and illness. Because some patients share a special bond with their pets and may find a pet visit comforting, we developed the pet visit program in the Intensive Care Unit of Baystate Medical Center, a 600-bed level I trauma center in Springfield, Mass.

The program has been in place for about three years, with more than 30 pet visits to the hospital's ICU. As a form of animal companionship therapy, patients spend time with their own dogs, cats or other pets, or schedule visits with prescribed animals provided by community volunteers.

Although we have no quantitative research data to document that these visits are helpful to patients in any measurable way, observations of staff and feedback from participants and their families have been positive. The success of visits to the ICU has opened the program to all other nursing units at Baystate.

In order to assure the visits run smoothly and that the privacy, safety and comfort of all patients are maintained.

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Ruiz named advisor

With 40 years of nursing practice in and beyond the U.S., Marlene Ruiz, RN, BSN, MA, has been named the editorial advisor of Excellence in Clinical Practice.

In this role, Ruiz will author guest articles on issues and trends in nursing clinical practice and help to shape the overall content of the publication.

She is one of three editors working with the customized versions of Excellence.

Ruiz is director of education and consulting services at Kaiser Permanente, San Diego, Calif. In this position, she is responsible for the orientation, inservice and continuing education of 6,500 employees and directs a staff of 17: "Her nursing experience has extended beyond the U.S. through teaching leadership programs in Latvia with an International Relief Teams program. Working with Project Concern International in Romania, she taught leadership content and assisted nurses and physicians in drafting bylaws for their newly formed perinatal association. She has been an invited speaker at the Russian American Nursing Conference in Russia and at a leadership program in St. Petersburg, Russia. She has traveled several European countries, looking at the health care delivery system and nursing roles, and teaches an introductory course on culture diversity at California State University, Dominguez Hills.

Ruiz’s nursing career has included clinical positions in labor and delivery, operating room and medical nursing service. She has worked with Kaiser Permanente for more than 30 years and is an active community member in numerous civic organizations including the San Diego County Nursing Program Advisory Board. To read more of Ruiz’s contributions, look for future issues of Excellence in Clinical Practice. For feedback on this issue, please email: mcdonald@stti.iupui.edu.

E-mail service interrupted

If you sent email to Sigma Theta Tau headquarters between January 19 and March 3, please resend your message. Our e-mail system was temporarily out of service the first week of March, and messages may have been lost including your selection of a version of Excellence. We apologize for this inconvenience.
Earn CEUs through online case studies

An innovative resource for providing a top quality, peer-reviewed continuing education model is available through Sigma Theta Tau International's Online Case Studies for Nursing.

You can complete courses for further education or meeting licensing or certification requirements in specialty areas at your own level or learning pace, and at the convenience of your professional and personal schedules. There are even opportunities to retake courses if you're not satisfied with your original score. Or you can participate in the program by writing case studies or serving as a peer reviewer for submissions.

"Nurses by nature are lifelong learners and this program helps to support them in their career and personal goals," says Patricia E. Thompson, RN, EdD, president of Sigma Theta Tau. "Because nurses have busy lives with a variety of professional demands, it's exciting to offer a continuing education opportunity that can be completed at their convenience and from the privacy of their own homes."

Registered nurses at any professional level or job responsibility who take the courses will gain point-of-care knowledge to make informed decisions about health including problem assessment, needs assessment strategies and planning, managing client/community health programs and evaluations.

"The experience and further education will prepare me to become more skilled at providing leadership to other geriatric nurses," says Tenhunen. "Having a mentor will provide support as I advance toward and achieve my goals."

Senior Fellow Andrea W. Koepke was one of the initial participants to complete Chiron in the fall of 1999.

Chiron 2000 participants include Former September K. Smith, Mississippi and Missouri Janis P. Bellack, South Carolina; Fellow Julie A. Olson, Wisconsin and Mentor and Enid C. Drebber, Iowa Fellow L. Tenhunen, California and Mentor Lois Evans, Pennsylvania.

"It's interactive, offers participation in chat rooms and forums, and links to additional nurses and review sites," says Tenhunen. "As a fellow within the senior fellow option, A mentor at the University of Minnesota, Andrea W. Koepke, was among the first to pursue new career opportunities. Chiron 2000 participants include former student to the Korean orphanage for children with disabilities. Koepke's plan included teaching at Seoul National University in South Korea, presenting at the national Honeywell Alpha-at-Large Chapter. She is a graduate of the Sigma Theta Tau chapter in Korea and is a member of the largest order of nurses in the world."

The opportunity offered through Chiron enabled Koepke to experience nursing practices of the eastern world and expanded her knowledge of teaching styles learned from her Korean colleagues. This experience strengthened her role as a leader within the School of Nursing at Anderson University, Anderson, Ind., where she is a faculty member. During her time in South Korea, Koepke took on another endeavor. She assisted the Lambeth Alpha-at-Large Chapter officers with chapter enhancement strategies and presented a continuing education workshop.

"My work with the Sigma Theta Tau chapter in Korea allowed me to function in the role of a leader," she says, "I feel renewed and capable of taking on new and exciting challenges. It will remain as one of the highlights of my life."

The deadline for Chiron 2001 applications is June 30, 2000.

For additional information visit nursingsociety.org/leadership/chiron.html or call 1.317.634.8171.

Teila Higgins is a journalism intern from Butler University, Indianapolis, Ind., working with the International Leadership Institute at Sigma Theta Tau International.
Through a collaborative process with physicians and other health disciplines, I give surgical clients with comorbidities that need attention in the ICU setting. Through construction and collaboration with the other intensive care nurses, they seek quality patient care and expedited discharge of a stable client to the inpatient unit. Attention to cost containment mechanisms while providing comprehensive, diligent care using critical care pathways makes their ICU special in these changing times.

The average age of the OR RN nationally is 47, and in San Diego it is more than 50. By not being exposed to the challenge and excitement of this nursing opportunity, students are not encouraged to pursue this avenue for lifelong careers. By observing no more than a case or two, they are ill prepared for OR nursing. The circulating roles in the OR require advanced critical thinking skills to serve as the patient advocate and risk management controller, and to provide care with all necessary resources. The Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) recommends those in circulating roles in the OR be RNs.

Finding OR nurses in work/school programs San Diego has eight large medical centers and many free-standing outpatient surgical centers. At any given time you can find vacant OR RN positions posted in half of them. Early in 1999 the OR department administrators and the nursing education community assessed the problem and created two initiatives. The University of California San Diego (UCSD), Children’s, Alvarado Hospital Medical Center, Palomar Pomerado Health Care System, Scripps Health Care and the Sharp Health Care System formed one program. "It was time to put competition aside and work together to achieve a positive outcome for all," says Suzanne Anderson, RN, director of surgical services, UCSD.

The program was organized under the UCSD’s extension program with options for continuing education credit. Each participating medical center contributed $5,000 for curriculum design and contracted with Mary Lou Blacharski, RN, to develop program content. One center donated unused space for an OR lab. All of the centers hired their own students for the course which resulted in 15 enrollments. Costs to students totaled a nominal $600 for books and materials. Many physicians volunteered lecture time for sessions about OR specialties, while Blacharski shaped course content about perioperative nursing, OR fundamentals, scrubbing, circulating and an overview of all OR specialties. After 12 weeks, 15 new OR nurses assumed viable roles in the participating medical centers. Earning as they were learning, the nurses were able to devote the needed time for a career change.

Program revamped for working nurses The second program was a partnership between the San Diego Veterans Administration Medical Center, Kaiser Permanente and the Regional Health Occupations Resource Center (RHORC). Southwest College had an existing eight-month long OR RN program, but it was time consuming for the working RN to complete without a source of income or a job guarantee upon completion. A group of OR administrators and educators met with campus faculty and MaryLou Vandenburg, RN, director of RHORC, based at Southwest College. The group was able to use the existing course, already approved by the curriculum committee and following AORN guidelines, and modify it to be more user friendly for students. The curriculum was changed from eight months to two modules of two months each.

Beverly Roling, RN, director of perioperative services at Kaiser Permanente, says the best program outcomes were filling long-standing vacancies and relieving the overtime burden from other nurses. An additional benefit was Roling's opportunity to help shape the course content by contributing key staff, and herself, as guest lecturers. Students in the course include new nursing graduates and experienced nurses. Associate degree college units and continuing education credit were awarded upon completion of the course, which cost students $500 for tuition and books. Of the 15 students, 13 were quickly employed by their supporting hospital or in an OR in the community. The two experienced post-surgical staff nurses in the course chose to return to their previous positions reporting they had a better understanding of many aspects of patient care needs from the program content.

Anticipating the retirement of some long-term employees, the OR directors of the participating medical centers say these two programs will be repeated in 2000. Work is already underway to offer an elective study in OR for senior-year nurses at San Diego State University, according to Dr. Pat Wahl, RN, director of the school of nursing. The past year was a good one for OR nursing in San Diego. Now OR directors and faculty can share their progress with their peers nationally.

For more information on these programs, e-mail: marlene.s.ruiz@kp.org.
The work of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, provides testimony to nursing's mission of service to humanity over a lifetime. As perhaps the greatest war nurse in history, she overcame obstacles to make significant contributions to the military health care system and hospital reform. She taught the use of social statistics and their graphical representation. She masterfully consulted with others to persuade governmental leaders to support large-scale reforms in public health practices. Using newly developed technology, she dramatically illustrated how death rates decreased when the spread of infection across populations was controlled through sanitation measures.

The Nightingale vision of service to community was validated recently by society members who guided the development of its newly crafted organizational vision. Our aim is "to create a global community of nurses who lead in using scholarship, knowledge and technology to improve the health of the world’s people." As we collaborate with individuals and groups in the broader community to carry out this mandate, members are urged to tell their inspiring stories. As full partners, the public deserves to know of nursing's contributions to society and to engage in dialogues about the ways in which the work of nursing might be supported now and in the future. Nurses Week provides the entree for nurturing relationships among nursing colleagues and our local communities.

 article resource/suggested reading


Jeanne M. Floyd, RN, PhD, CAE, is director of research and evaluation at Sigma Theta Tau International.