

Personal and professional networking: A way forward in achieving quality nursing care

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Introduction

Health Care is a continuous process which has to be initiated, rendered, evaluated, improved and continuously monitored. Care is extended to include wellness, health promotion and disease prevention. Personnel interaction is extremely important in providing quality care. Health care today is provided by highly educated and sophisticatedly skilled individuals and these individuals cannot provide a total quality care without relying on teamwork. Interpersonal, interdepartmental, inter institutional communication and relationship in the health care profession play a tremendous role in shaping the process of care to ensure positive outcome in patients.

In today's health care profession quality is said to be the key for excellence in care; and it is not quality at any cost, it is quality at competitive cost. And quality can be achieved only by having vision, courage, determination and conviction. The basic and most essential key element for quality and excellence in patient care is net working; both personal and professional. Through a variety of techniques and for a multitude of reasons, health educators can enrich their professional endeavors by interacting and engaging in formal and informal networking with others.¹ To achieve evidence based nursing, professional net working need to be facilitated.²

What is networking?

Networking is "the process of establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with other professionals and clients".¹ It is a long term process of building linkages and maintaining relationships throughout professional life. Professional and personal relationships and contacts established by networking are some of the most effective methods for improving patient care.

Why is networking important?

Networking is essential to make a difference in patient care and it really influences health care agenda at local; national and international levels. Through networking, health professionals can offer each other assistance and support while establishing long-lasting mutually beneficial relationships.¹

Net working is essential to:

- Provide unlimited contacts and linkages that can result in more evidence based clinical practice.¹
- Collect, aggregate, organize, move and represent information in an economical, and efficient way that is useful for the users.
- Find and talk to the right people about information and

- advice on professional and patient care opportunities.
- Bring the effect of time to time cultural changes in the professional practice.³
- Successfully develop selected cadre of skills and knowledge essential for the changing health care needs of clients.
- Encourage nurses to improve patient care by encouraging them to use the most up to date methods in patient care.
- Bridge the gap between research and practice which is a serious obstacle to achieving excellence in patient care.
- Manage, analyze and utilize data vital for patient care and to make it accessible to health care providers when it is needed most.
- Support nurses who design, implement and manage information technology and systems that enhance patient care.
- Bring together diverse groups of nursing personnel to discuss issues and developments of common concern.⁴
- Share information on new tools, methodologies and technologies.
- Provide support for professional colleagues to overcome professional hurdles.⁵
- Facilitate feedback among professional colleagues.⁴
- Provide help and facilitation to experts to demonstrate their expertise.⁶
- Integrate best evidence into practice and promote research.⁷

The research that explored the relationship between collegial networking and faculty vitality revealed that respondents with collegial networks were more actively participating in several academic activities.⁸ Another research conducted on the influence of colleagues on academic success of faculty identified that those faculty who got recognition for contribution and research frequently consulted colleagues.⁹ International networking enhances progress in nursing education as well.¹⁰ It is also important that educators give students the opportunity to improve their networking skills.¹¹ Professional networking is not constricted in the narrow space of nursing alone. Nursing personnel should reach out to all the components of health care providers and need to network with them, or else, as a group it is difficult to prove the importance in the health care delivery system.¹² Innovative professional organizations need to develop their work through deliberate development of networking techniques to move innovation into practice.¹³ By collecting new types of data and providing it to the participants, in the health care system, nursing professionals may be able to improve the quality of care without improving the costs. There are three distinct trends; all of these involve networking and information sharing.¹⁴

- Healthcare researchers are producing information that promises to improve the quality of care. Networking has been identified as potential approach to encourage health-professionals to conduct practice-based research.

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- Policy makers are now informing consumers that they have an opportunity to use their buying power to produce a more responsive and effective health care system.
- Consumers themselves are using information to assume more direct responsibility for their own health.

Networking and evidence based health care

The consumers are looking forward for the best care most cost effectively. Effective integration of research evidence into every day clinical practice continues to be an important challenge.⁷ Hence nurses as a professional group must engage in more and more evidence based practices rather than harping on traditional ways. Partly because of insufficient outcome research and partly because of insufficient professional networking, health care practices vary widely and inexplicably from region to region. Net working is an important aspect of incorporating evidence based practice in patient care.¹⁵

Networking and health care consumers

Another important group of people with whom we need to network are the patients and their families. Educated consumers of health care will become a driving force for improvements in the quality of health care. Patients and their families want to be active participants in their own care. Today's patients are coming to the hospitals armed with more information from web than the passive patients of the past. They tell us about new research findings and experimental treatments. The health care team members need to know hundreds of different diseases, whereas a patient need to know only one disease, hence it's amazing what patient can learn. Well informed patients and their families can significantly enhance the treatment and quality of care. Hence, networking with consumers of health care is essential for achieving quality care.

How to do networking

Networking doesn't mean only electronic and satellite media. In a caring profession professional colleagues are the best sources for networking, supported by electronic media.¹⁶ Networking occurs in personal, professional or organizational frame work. The basic steps are:

1. Know your goals.
2. Identify the relevant people.
3. Contact the identified people individually.
4. Meet each person face to face or through media.
5. Be creative and open-minded.
6. Exchange drafts of information.
7. Follow up

Although networking is an easy skill to learn and maintain, it does require effort and perseverance to be successful. It can be a time consuming commitment. We need to get organized, set goals, take notes and keep records throughout the ongoing process.

Levels of professional networking

Professional networking maybe

- Institutional
- Local
- Regional
- National or
- *nternational*

Every effort should be taken to net work at all levels to develop

as a full-fledged professional. Net working need to start at institutional level and then expand to other levels for better benefits.

Pyramid of Professional networking

Net working can never be a one way process. An effective net worker is an important part of many other peoples' professional life. We need to know how we can be of assistance to others, let them know, and be receptive when they contact us. We must be willing to take the initiative in establishing and maintaining relationships. Networking is the most effective way to stay cutting edge with our information and knowledge, remain visible and connected to our profession, promote quality patient care and keep our social skills sharp. And professional networking can make us excellent in our current jobs. Finally professional networking will bring us a common identity. The pyramid of professional networking shows how the interaction by few individuals will lead to a common identity.



Conclusion

Remember always
Professional networking:

- Takes time...we have to be patient and let it happen.
- Focuses on particular individuals and particular relationships.
- Produces bonds of reciprocal obligation through the exchange of favors.
- Calls for a significant but manageable up front investment.
- Requires you to cultivate a realistic awareness of power.
- Involves a variety of communication media
- Forces you to develop communication skills in each of these media.

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