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Reflections on the Voice of Nursing

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The nursing voice is the heart of a magnet institution. It is from our experiences that we learn and grow into professional nurses. I always wondered what it would be like to take what I have learned from my nursing experience and share it with other nurses; not like a teacher with a student but a peer to peer relationship that would improve our practice. Unlike those casual conversations I have had with other nurses about the direction of care with one of my patients at 2am, I wanted to make an impact that reaches throughout our organization. About a year ago that idea started to become a reality with the formation of the UC San Diego Health System Nursing Shared Governance Cabinet.

The nursing cabinet is a structured nursing committee that helps improve information sharing, gathering and support from our bedside nurses to our executive leaders. During one of those first few meetings, I asked how I could help with this cabinet. I first started attending as a representative for the SCVC ICU UBPC. It was new and exciting, a bit scary and an unfamiliar direction for our organization – we had never brought together all our units to meet monthly and have this kind of authority to make changes and vote on new nursing practices. This was a great opportunity to participate in helping with the new makeup of our organizational structure. When the call came for co-chairs to lead the cabinet, I knew I would wonder what the heck I was thinking... But I did it. I volunteered to be a co-chair of the Nursing Cabinet.

Our structure is simple.

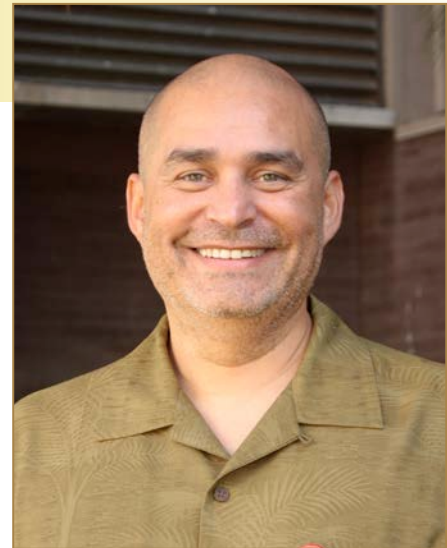
Representatives of our nursing units shared governance chairs or co-chairs

will sit on this cabinet, as well as the chair or co-chair of the hospital nursing councils, including the Nursing Executive Committee. Every unit in nursing that has a shared governance unit-based council is represented at this meeting. Every month, designated unit councils or hospital councils provide an update of what their group is doing projects, activities and any significant changes that are being made to our practice. While this may sound unexciting, what has come out of this practice is the sharing of ideas, practices and an exchange of how things are getting done on other units and specialty areas in the hospitals. I feel as though I understand our hospital so much better now, and feel proud to know that our units have all done excellent work in advancing nursing practice and improving patient care.

If you asked me what I have brought to this group and why I chose to participate and help lead in a direction we have never gone before, my answer is simple. I bring no more skills than the next person who attends these meetings. I believe that as we change the way we do things we will transform our culture from “that’s the way it has always been” to “This is the best practice.” I sincerely believe that.

There are still many things I would like to help or participate in to make changes or improve our practice.

However, what I have learned in my journey over the last year as the co-chair of the Nursing Cabinet is just because we venture in a new direction to make change doesn’t mean change will happen but if we promote and participate in change we will be heard. And that creates the change in how we do things. Whether you are an ICU nurse, a PCU



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nurse, a Med-Surg. Nurse or an administrator, the Nursing Cabinet provides you an avenue to be heard; gives you an opportunity to share information; and promotes a way to transform into a culture supportive of nursing practice and leadership.

This new nursing organizational structure promotes communication, participation, collaboration and ultimately improves patient care and outcomes. Over the last year the challenges I have had in helping run the nursing cabinet have only been silenced by the greatness of the people who participate in the cabinet meetings.

There are many of you out there who want to be heard and make change. I know this because I work alongside you and I have met you at these and other meetings. For the coming year I challenge you to step forward, be heard and in the process, make change.