



Pittsburgh Regional Healthcare Initiative

Reprinted from *PRHI Executive Summary*, March 2002

Naida Grunden, editor

West Penn Learning Unit Makes Progress

If you had a chance to establish a Perfecting Patient Care Learning Unit in your hospital, where would you put it?

The Perfecting Patient Care system is all about fixing problems in the course of work and tracking problems to their root cause. So the idea is to put a Learning Unit in an area of the hospital where lots of departments and functions intersect. Tracking problems into various areas of the hospital offers the best opportunity to share learning.

The Ambulatory Surgery Center at West Penn Hospital is one such hospital “nerve center,” where staff interact closely with patients, the lab and the operating rooms, and where functions include everything from scheduling to registration to printing. When Dr. Tony DiGioia recently began his orthopedic surgery work at West Penn Hospital, he saw the ASC staff working very hard, and believed that a Learning Unit could help ease their work loads and—most important—create a more patient-centered environment.

Right away, Dr. DiGioia noticed a busy hallway where patients sat, dressed in hospital gowns, sometimes for an hour or more.

Generally, the surgical admittance procedure begins days ahead of time, as staffers begin to build the patients’ charts with the necessary forms and information. When the day of surgery arrives, the patient checks in at the registration desk and waits in the waiting room with family members. At that point, patients used to be called to another area, asked to change into hospital gowns and wait in a hallway chair. When a bed in the surgical prep area became available, the patient would move from chair to bed.

“We’d been using the chairs to ‘store’ patients for 20 years,” said Ms. Gloria Teichman, RN, Team Leader of the West Penn Learning Unit. “We wanted to be sure

they were ready. But we realized nobody who works here ever had to sit in the chairs. We wanted to fix it immediately.”

The team of secretaries and nurses set out to find a solution. They realized that the system relied on “pushing” patients into waiting areas, rather than waiting for the “pull” of bed availability. The team devised a system where the charge nurse in the surgical prep area would call the secretary as a bed became available.

Initial reluctance within the team gave way to, “We might as well try it tomorrow.”

In a matter of hours, the experiment was deemed a success. Since that day, no patient has had to sit in the hallway in a hospital gown. Waiting time decreases; scheduling efficiency increases.

As Team Leader, Ms. Teichman actually learned the work of the secretary, the receptionist, and the chart-maker, in an attempt to understand the interactions or “pathways” in the workflow.

“A job may look easy until you try to do it yourself,” she explains.

To understand how work is done, Ms. Teichman has taken “field trips” to the lab, to registration and scheduling, even to the print shop—some places where, in her 22 years at West Penn Hospital, she had never been. Her visits have exposed workers in those areas to some basic principles of the Perfecting Patient Care system.

The chairs are one small example of an improvement that was made immediately, once it was understood as a problem. Ms. Teichman has many more examples—including the charting improvements (see chart on next page). Her hopes for the future include reductions in waiting time for operating rooms. ❧

West Penn Hospital has an investment in Gloria Teichman. For almost a year, 100% of her time has been allocated as Team Leader. How can Ms. Teichman’s wisdom and experience be used to begin training others in the Perfecting Patient Care system? It would be tempting to ship her from place to place, asking her to set up Learning Units as she goes.

But that’s not how it works.

The Learning Unit at West Penn’s Ambulatory Surgery Center is there to stay. As more problems are solved in the journey toward perfect patient care, and the Team Leader will remain an integral part of the system. Those who want to learn the system will need to become “Lend-Forwards” and serve at the Learning Unit.

The Lend Forward at West Penn is Fran Sheedy-Bost, a member of the Vision Committee for the Allegheny County Behavioral Health initiative. Her charge is to determine how the Perfecting Patient Care system might be best used in mental health care.

Alongside her PRHI trainer, Lisa Beckwith, Ms. Sheedy-Bost was assigned to learn chart-building from the workers in the Chart Room. Her first job was to cultivate trust among a staff that didn’t know her, convincing them that she was there to support them by helping them solve problems. In learning the job she began to help reveal problems—the first step toward fixing them.

Case in point: Chart builders assemble elaborate charts for patients coming in for surgery. These charts contain all necessary forms for patient, hospital, insurance, and physician. Every single form in the chart must be stamped beforehand with the patient’s identifying information. If a form is not stamped, a nurse in the pre-surgery area is usually the one to discover it. The NURSE had to take apart the entire chart, stamp the blank paper, then reassemble the chart—2 min 10 sec of RN time—initially 70 minutes, 25 seconds per day.

Making a few simple changes in the course of their work, the chart builders have almost eliminated the problem. Charts will soon be delivered to the RNs 100% stamped and **defect-free**. The new system will make it impossible to deliver a defective chart. ☺

