Peggy Doyle is a leader who brings people together, regardless of their discipline or role. For 27 years, she has served as director of the OR and perioperative services at Brigham & Women’s Hospital in Boston, one of the nation’s leading medical centers.

Doyle has assisted Brigham through more than 2 decades of growth, including the combination of 4 OR suites after the merger of 3 hospitals, expansion from 4 to 39 operating rooms, the evolution of outpatient surgery and same-day admissions, and the adoption of technology to improve the efficiency and quality of care.

She’s kept ties to nursing while forging close working relationships with surgeons, anesthesiologists, and support staff.

Doyle will be honored as OR Manager of the Year Nov 8 to 10 at the Managing Today’s OR Suite Conference in Orlando, Fla.

As OR Manager of the Year, Doyle receives an expense-paid trip to the Managing Today’s OR Suite conference, including airfare, hotel, meals, and registration. She also receives a scholarship from Kimberly-Clark Health Care to attend the Georgetown University Healthcare Leadership Institute in Washington, DC, in the summer of 2007.

“Peggy’s hallmark is her visionary approach and uncanny ability to see beyond the activities of the nursing department,” wrote OR assistant nurse managers Barbara DiTullio, RN, BSN, MA, and Kathleen Leavitt, RN, BSN, in one of the 20 letters sent in support of Doyle’s nomination.

“Peggy is the type of nursing leader who is needed in every OR throughout the country,” wrote Brigham’s chief of surgery, Michael J. Zinner, MD, saying she is part of the reason Brigham is able “to recruit some of the very best nurses throughout the city and state.”

Brigham’s chief medical officer, Anthony J. Whittemore, MD, cited Doyle’s ability to be an “extraordinary leader” in “a complex OR environment perpetually constrained by insufficient capacity and lack of funds.”

He said Doyle has navigated her staff steadily through crises, including the serious flooding of 4 or 5 ORs, power outages that disabled central processing, and unanticipated overloads of trauma cases.

“Her ability to deliver so reliably in the face of adversity testifies to the devotion of her nursing staff and their willingness to push beyond,” his letter said.

An early nursing mentor

Doyle first experienced OR nursing when it was part of every student nurse’s rotation.

“I enjoyed it, so I stayed,” she says.

Early on, she identified a nurse leader she wanted to emulate, Martha Krutt, at what was then Boston City Hospital.

“She was a great leader who could have managed any organization,” Doyle says. “She was a strong, independent nurse at a time when nurses were often humble. She also had a great relationship with the physicians and her peers in nursing.”

Doyle was recruited for her first management position at the age of 25.

Realizing the need for more education, she went on to earn her baccalaureate and master’s degrees in nursing.
Advocate for technology

As the technology of surgery has advanced, Doyle has participated in its evolution. In the 1980s, she envisioned the need for airport-type monitors that would show the status of all of Brigham’s ORs. She and a team of nurses created the specs for what would become OR Display, software developed by Brigham’s IT staff that has been in use for 10 years.

OR Display “has been instrumental in helping the OR staff perform 30,000 annual procedures with 85% utilization at an average hospital census of 91%,” says Hugh L. Flanagan, MD, medical director of the OR suite and postanesthesia care unit.

Doyle also helped guide development of OR facilities to house the world’s first intraoperative MRI scanner, installed in 1994. She is now involved in planning a suite to house a high-tech OR, PET/CT scanner, and high-field MRI scanner.

Collaborating with others

But it is Doyle’s ability to lead and collaborate with others, including staff, physicians, administrators, patients, and families that was mentioned most in her nominations.

Asked what quality she thinks has helped her most as a leader, Doyle says she believes it is this ability to develop good relations with others.

“You need to have the ability to talk with others about any issue but do so in a respectful way,” she says.

It’s not always easy, she says candidly. “Communication and dialogue are things we work on every day of our lives. The question is, ‘How do we disagree but come to consensus on common ground?’”

Recently, acknowledging that she herself felt challenged by some communication issues, Doyle arranged for 100 nurses, physicians, and support staff to participate in a 3-day seminar to teach the skills of Crucial Conversations, provided by VitalSmarts (www.vitalsmarts.com).

“We work a lot on team building here,” she adds. “We have a strong leadership group in perioperative services. They are supportive of one another and have developed good relationships.”

Staying at the top

Brigham & Women’s is one of only 3 hospitals nationwide named to Solucient’s list of the Top 100 Hospitals 10 or more times. How does Brigham’s perioperative services department continue to function at the level needed to help the institution stay at that high level of performance? Doyle cites a cohesive nursing leadership group and a strong relationship with surgical and anesthesia colleagues.

“We all have respect for each other’s disciplines,” she says. “It really is a team.”