Barbara is not afraid to take educated risks to make a difference. Barbara will challenge the status quo and is open to change. She is a true team player, always able to look at the big picture.”

That is an excerpt from one letter sent on behalf of Barbara McKinnon, RN, BSN, CNOR, this year’s OR Manager of the Year. McKinnon is nurse manager of the operating rooms at New England Baptist Hospital in Boston, where she oversees 12 ORs with a staff of 80 FTEs at one of the nation’s leading hospitals for orthopedics.

McKinnon will be honored at the Managing Today’s OR Suite Conference to be held Oct 29 to 31 in Washington, DC. As OR Manager of the Year, she receives an expense-paid trip to the conference.

In the letter, Gail Sebet, RN, BSN, CNOR, New England Baptist’s director of perioperative services and a colleague of McKinnon’s for 30 years, also noted McKinnon’s commitment to patient safety, leadership, and compassion for patients, among other qualities.

The nominating letters portray a leader with a strong emphasis on patients and staff.

“Barbara has never lost focus on why she became a nurse. She engages her staff to work as a team, be respectful of coworkers, be efficient, and most importantly, practice safe perioperative nursing,” wrote the OR educator, Sherry L. Gomes, RN, BSN, CNOR, ONC.

A few of McKinnon’s accomplishments:

• training of new graduates and inexperienced RNs for the specialty orthopedic hospital
• 100% compliance with the Universal Protocol for surgical site verification and medication labeling in the OR
• education in safety measures during major construction for the OR, central sterile reprocessing, preoperative area, and postanesthesia care unit (PACU).

RNs connect with families

One of McKinnon’s achievements is gaining approval for an additional RN position to serve as surgical liaison for patients and families.

“These nurses go and talk to the families,” she explains. They go into the OR to check on the status of cases and let families know when patients will be going to their rooms. The nurses not only provide support for families but help reduce phone calls to the OR. They may be one reason New England Baptist rates in the 99th percentile for patient satisfaction with Press Ganey.

A pep rally for staff

McKinnon has also been an advocate for the staff. Last year, when 11 staff members suddenly left to relocate, retire, or respond to the lure of higher pay, McKinnon was looking for a way to shore up morale.

It was football season, and Perioperative Nurse Week was approaching, so McKinnon decided to hold a “pep rally.” She got decorations and invited physicians and senior administrators.

She asked the manager of central sterile reprocessing, Mark Duro, CRCST, to help her put together a PowerPoint to recognize every staff group, including the “rookies”
(orientees), the “defense” (nurses who monitor patient safety practices), and “coaches” (managers). After the cheers, everyone gathered for a “tailgate party.”

Duro wrote: “I have worked with over 11 different OR managers in my years, and Barbara is my favorite. This is because she has always been fair, insightful, and a total team player.”

McKinnon managed to fill the staff vacancies within a short time.

During the long winter months, realizing the staff needed a lift, she came up with creative, short-term benefits at no cost to the hospital, a popular program that “was talked about for months,” wrote Ann Callahan, RN, a clinical resource nurse.

Some of the perks:
• Select your assignment for a week.
• Choose your team members for a day.
• No late shifts for one time schedule.
• An on-site parking pass for a week (McKinnon offered her own pass).

Keeping the OR moving

At an orthopedic hospital, with complicated instrumentation and setups, turnover times are always a challenge. McKinnon instituted a “turnover team” to expedite the process. When a case is finishing, the staff calls for the team. The teams, facilitated by an RN and a surgical technologist, clean the room and prepare for the next case while the circulating nurse finishes documentation and goes to see the next patient.

Patient safety measures

Like other ORs, McKinnon and her team have worked to achieve compliance with patient safety goals. With an orthopedic caseload, the hospital has always been focused on right-site verification.

“I think we were a little ahead of the game,” she says.

The attending surgeon has traditionally signed the site, and McKinnon herself monitors compliance.

Persistence also drove compliance with medication labeling on the sterile field.

“We had observers go around, and they would report to the staff on their compliance,” she says. When compliance plateaued at 90% to 95%, monitors went underground to spot where improvement was needed.

“Everyone finally realized we were checking on them,” she says.

McKinnon admits that she originally didn’t like change.

“But I also wanted to do it safely and make sure the staff was involved.” When new ORs were planned, the staff nurses had a big role in planning, as they do when new policies are developed.

“People are always stopping in my office to make suggestions, or just to vent,” she says.

She admits that when she read the nominating letters, she was taken aback.

“This is the manager I strive to be but didn’t know I had become,” she says.