OR Manager Conference

OR Manager of the Year embraces golden rule

Letters nominating Pamela Smith, BSN, RN, CNOR, as the 2013 OR Manager of the Year described her as a leader who has supported her staff and their decisions, an advocate for education, and a clinical manager who “drives quality and efficiency while balancing high patient and staff satisfaction scores.”

Smith, manager of the OR at Bon Secours St Francis Hospital in Charleston, South Carolina, will be honored at a luncheon on Tuesday, September 24, during the OR Manager Conference in National Harbor, Maryland.

St Francis, a community-based hospital, is the only Magnet facility in the “low country” part of South Carolina, according to Smith. She has been there since 1981, gradually working her way up from LPN to RN and ultimately to perioperative clinical manager in 2002. Smith has a staff of 70 and manages the sterile processing department (SPD) and 8 OR suites along with a cysto suite and a minor procedure room.

Getting certification

“In 2005, we only had 3 nurses who were certified as CNOR. I felt that certification was important for our patients and our staff, so we began engaging staff and within a year we were at 92% certification,” she says. “We’ve maintained that 92% level for our RNs, and our scrub techs and SPD techs are at 100% certification.”

By getting her certification at the same time as her staff, Smith won over those who initially balked at the new requirement. “As long as you’re willing to participate and do the things you’re asking your team to do, it’s much easier to get buy-in,” she says.

Achieving efficiencies

“I have witnessed year-after-year improvement in first-case on-time starts, first-shift utilization, block scheduling, SCIP [Surgical Care Improvement Program] success, and employee satisfaction,” writes Mitchell J. Siegan, MD, chair of the hospital’s anesthesia department and medical director of the perioperative service, who supported Smith’s nomination.

Clinical nurse specialist Jennifer Vieau also praised Smith’s efforts to boost efficiency, noting that immediate-use sterilization rates and unintended hypothermia rates have dropped during her tenure.

While modest about her accomplishments, Smith cites better communication between the OR and the SPD as a notable achievement. An OR/SPD process improvement committee composed of nurses, surgical technologists, and the SPD coordinator meets each month to brainstorm about how to be more efficient. As a result, the hospital now hires surgical technologists into the SPD so they can be cross-trained between the OR and the SPD, she says.

Fostering teamwork

Being honest and fair with staff and having open communication are the cornerstones of Smith’s leadership style. “In order to lead them, I have to treat them how I want to be treated. That sounds so basic, but it’s true,” she says.

“Be prepared to work. Everyone is part of the team,” Smith tells new hires. “I am
right there with them. It’s not uncommon for me to be turning rooms, helping patients, whatever needs to be done. We’re here for the patients.”

St Francis employees are part of an extended family, Smith says. “We have staff who have been here for 10 or 15 years, and they do a good job of bringing new people into the fold.”

Dr Siegan concurs: “Many of our RNs and technicians have been working in this unit for over a decade. As a result, we have no traveling nurses or technicians. I cannot overstate the importance of having such deep-rooted relationships among our surgeons, anesthesiologist, nurses, and technicians.”

That close collaboration is reinforced through the Back Pack Buddies program, which gives elementary school students from low-income areas food to take home. Smith’s team participates by going to the food bank, picking up the month’s shipment of food, bringing it back to work, packaging it, and taking it to the school.

Being a team player and living by the golden rule have made Smith a highly successful leader, and while she is thrilled to have been named OR Manager of the Year, she is quick to give credit to her staff: “I’m the recipient of the award, but it’s really about the staff and the hard work they do. They’re the ones who deserve the recognition.” ✦