Managing Today’s OR Suite

OR leaders hear about culture of safety

Managing Today’s OR Suite conference attendees hit a winning streak of networking and lessons learned in Las Vegas.

Participants attending the 22nd annual conference October 7 to 9, 2009, networked with colleagues and listened to inspiring and informative presentations ranging from creating a culture of safety to operating a successful robotic surgery program.

The 665 participants chose among 8 all-day seminars, 28 breakout sessions, and 4 general sessions. They also visited the 84 exhibitors and attended educational programs in the exhibit hall.

In his keynote, Captain Stephen Harden, BS, ATP, a pilot for a major airline, discussed how to create a culture of safety by applying lessons from the aviation industry. As president of LifeWings Partners, LLC, in Memphis, Tennessee, he works with health care organizations to apply aviation safety principles.

Embedding safety culture

Harden cited Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger’s successful landing of a plane in New York’s Hudson River as an example of a culture of safety. Harden contended that the successful landing “wasn’t as much as a miracle on the Hudson [as portrayed by the media] as a logical outcome of the culture of safety at US Airways.”

So how do leaders change culture? Harden suggested applying this equation: thoughts + actions + habits + character = culture. Thoughts are changed with training. “People understand the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of what motivates them to do what is right because it’s congruent with their view of the world,” said Harden.

System tools such as standard operating procedures help establish desired actions. “Make it easy to do the right thing and hard to do the wrong thing,” said Harden.

Leaders should model desired behavior to help establish habits. Harden encouraged leaders to focus on “daily moments of truth” that develop character.

Harden advocated the use of tools such as checklists but noted that standard tools needed to be adapted for the organization’s use. “The people who do the work must create the tools,” he said and added that staff “should hold each other accountable.”

Easing nursing shortage only temporary

The current ease in the nursing shortage is only a temporary reprieve, according to Peter Buerhaus, RN, PhD, FAAN, professor of nursing at Vanderbilt
University School of Nursing in Nashville, and a leading researcher on the nursing workforce.

Buerhaus noted an interesting historic pattern in RN employment—it increases during a recession, consistent with the recent historic surge in RN employment. This isn’t surprising considering that 70% of RNs are married, and many spouses have either lost jobs or fear job loss.

More than half of the increase in the workforce consists of RNs older than 50 years. Hospitals are seeing the most change. “Nonhospital settings lost 50,000 jobs,” said Buerhaus, as nurses flocked to hospitals for “higher wages, richer benefits, and flexible schedules.”

Buerhaus says the good news is hospitals now have an experienced RN workforce whose expertise in recognizing complications reduces the number of failure-to-rescue cases. “The worrisome part is it’s going to be hard to get them in the room to spot the complications—we’re wearing them out,” said Buerhaus. He emphasized the need for better ergonomics and resources to ease nurses’ burdens.

**Thriving on multiple priorities**

Brian Lee, CSP, CEO, of Custom Learning Systems Group, LTD, took participants on a

---

Above, top to bottom: Nurse and comedian Karyn Buxman (right) had the audience laughing with her message about seeing humor in even the most difficult of circumstances.

Attendees learn about team dynamics in a breakout on how to make nursing practice councils more effective.

Cheryn Johnson spoke on “taming the turnover beast.”
whirlwind tour of how they can thrive in a world of multiple priorities. A few secrets:

• Put time in perspective. Lee says it’s important to understand that, “Time control is self-control.”

• Prioritize for important and urgent. Lee recommends a priority matrix with 4 quadrants: important and urgent (major projects), urgent and not important (planning), important and not urgent (to do), and not urgent and not important (not to do).

• Organize one hour a day of “prime time.” During the hour, work on major projects and planning. “Do things today that don’t need to be done today,” said Lee.

Amazed and amused

A nurse and comedian Karyn Buxman, RN, MSN, CSP, CPAE, wrapped up the conference with her entertaining presentation, Amazed & Amused: How to Survive and Thrive as a Health Care Professional. Buxman, publisher of the Journal of Nursing Jocularity, took attendees on a funny, sometimes emotional, journey about leadership. Weaving in her personal experiences, Buxman’s insights on effective humor and leadership left attendees with food for thought as they headed off for the airport.

—Cynthia Saver, RN, MS

Cynthia Saver is a freelance writer in Columbia, Maryland.