OR leaders gather in Chicago

A record-breaking number of OR directors, managers, and business managers converged at the Hyatt Regency Chicago for the 24th Annual Managing Today’s OR Suite conference September 28 to 30, 2011.

The 1,029 attendees heard information-packed programs, viewed innovative posters, networked with colleagues, and visited the 95 exhibitors. Attendees took time to gather ideas to help them in their roles and to reflect on the work they do every day.

In her keynote, Eileen McDargh, CSP, CPAE, president of McDargh Communications, explained how participants can use “radical resiliency” to transform their future in the face of turbulent times. The keynote was sponsored by Kimberly-Clark Health Care.

Taking her cue from a Tina Turner song, McDargh, an award-winning author and a consultant, told the audience, “You are simply the best.”

Radical resiliency

“We cannot go back,” said McDargh, who said resiliency is about “growing through” challenge, not about bouncing back. Resilient people have developed 4 skills: adaptability, agility, laughability, and alignment.

Adaptability includes challenging common knowledge and being open to inquiry. McDargh advised asking questions such as, “What is it I’m thinking, and does it serve me? Am I looking for viewing points, not just a point of view? How can I constantly turn around so I see more and more options?”

McDargh said agility is “speed coupled with wisdom.” It’s important to act quickly when there is a problem because “action is the antidote for anxiety.” Agility also includes facing what you fear and moving forward, and not becoming “too comfortable.”

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“Laughter is the shortest distance between two people,” keynoter Eileen McDargh told the audience in her talk titled Radical Resilience.
“Alignment is the secret to sustainability,” McDargh said. Keeping focused on the big picture and the purpose of what you do helps maintain alignment.

**Positive deviance yields positive results**

Jon Lloyd, MD, FACS, senior associate for the Positive Deviance Initiative at Tufts University, spoke on positive deviance (PD), which is based on the observation that in every community are individuals or groups whose uncommon behaviors or strategies have enabled them to find better solutions than their peers using existing resources. PD focuses on *practice* rather than *knowledge*. “Knowledge alone does not change behavior,” Dr Lloyd said. For example, providers know hand hygiene and barrier precautions reduce infection, but they continue not to practice them consistently.

PD, he said, is a “strengths-based, problem-solving approach” that relies on actively listening to people. He became interested in PD when he read how it had been used to improve childhood malnutrition in Vietnam and has found it be applicable to health care.

“Solutions to seemingly intractable problems already exist in your OR and hospital,” he said. “Your front-line staff are your gurus; no one knows what they know about their work.” PD is an approach for staff to discover and spread their hidden solutions. In the PD process, the “community” moves through the following steps: define, determine, discover, design, discern, disseminate. “It is the community that defines its problems,” said Dr Lloyd. Dr Lloyd was involved in bringing PD to the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System in a project to prevent MRSA transmissions. “Front-line staff turned out to be the world experts on preventing MRSA,” he said. His specific examples illustrated how staff developed ownership in the solutions. The efforts paid off in reduced MRSA rates.

**A light-hearted break**

It wasn’t all education for attendees, who enjoyed the sounds of The Laryngospasms, an “almost famous” group of certified registered nurse anesthetists. The crowd
laughed along with OR-related songs like “Wakin’ Up Is Hard to Do,” “Rollin’, Scopin,’” and “Mister Gas Man,” as group members sang and danced with audience members.

**Live your life, dream your dreams**

Wrapping up the conference was “Live your life…dream your dreams,” presented by Sharon Weinstein, MS, RN, CRNI, FACW, FAAN, president, Core Consulting Group, and author of *B is for Balance*. Weinstein encouraged participants to believe in their dreams and to “always think, what if.” She shared her moving personal story of suffering from childhood abuse, becoming a nurse, and asking her husband of 40 years to marry her after a handful of dates. She said the last event made her realize that “In life, if you don’t ask, you don’t get.”

Weinstein shared helpful life strategies, including “being present” in the moment, which opens you up to benefits such as reduced stress, innovation, and higher performance. Another strategy is to create balance: “You will be happiest, healthiest, and most productive when you learn how to manage your energy and your time—that is, your work time, and your own time.”

—Cynthia Saver, MS, RN

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