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Educational Offerings: Can We Motivate People To Attend?

by Roxanne Amerson, BSN, RN, C, Member, Council of CE and Staff Development

The healthcare crisis of recent years has affected all levels of providers. Many issues can be cited that increase the stress and day-to-day demands of nursing staff. Continuing education and staff development departments have begun to feel the effects, not just on the departmental staff, but in the participants of educational offerings.

Several issues of concern are echoed from various types of institutions. Monetary restrictions, lack of time to attend educational offerings, and poor interest in attending offerings are some of the major problems that educators report. Monetary restrictions are evidenced by a lack of funds from the unit level of clinical staff to restriction of funds available to continuing education departments for presenting workshops and classes. As nursing staff have higher work demands placed on them, their time to attend workshops has decreased. Many unit managers feel that they do not have the staff to provide adequate coverage for patients while nursing staff attend in-services. Most educators report that attendance and interest in workshops remain at an all-time low, even when workshops are planned at convenient times and are free of charge. So what can we do as educators to decrease these problems and increase the motivation of staff to attend classes that we offer?

A critical step is to identify the problems which have created low attendance or poor participation in the past, specific to your institution or unit group. Educators must identify and understand the issues that will impact on the attendance rates and participation of nursing staff. Once these issues are explored it is the role of the educator to find innovative ways to provide information that will meet the needs of the clinical staff.

Lack of funds is a major drawback in meeting educational needs. Clinical unit managers are being asked to conserve dollars spent and clinical staff have less money to spend on what they see as non-essential educational offerings. While limited funding may be a concern of the medical facility, many possibilities exist to provide education to staff free of costs. Representatives from pharmacological companies, wound care companies, and medical equipment suppliers are eager to present educational

offerings in exchange for a chance to promote their products at your institution. State grants are available to meet the educational needs of specific populations of nurses and nursing students. Graduate nursing students frequently are required to make presentations to complete their clinical practicum requirements. Educators can contact graduate programs in the nearby community to find students with specific areas of concentration that can provide classes to meet the needs of the institution.

Lack of time to attend classes can be combated in several ways. It is important that the educator coordinate with unit managers to determine the type of in-service that is needed for that specific unit. By allowing the manager to choose a time that is convenient for their staff, higher attendance rates can be anticipated. An additional method of decreasing time away from the unit is to plan the educational sessions directly on the unit or within the facility. This method will be cost-effective by eliminating travel time and expense for the participant and the medical facility. Many new and creative educational programs are available through teleconferencing, computer-assisted programs, and self-directed study programs. Self-directed study and distance education programs are gaining popularity as people strive to balance the demands of work, school, and family in today's world.

Once funding and opportunities for attendance are met the last factor to be considered is the issue of motivation and interest by participants. It is essential that the educator plan sessions that are reflective of adult learning theories. Nursing staff must feel that the information they will be receiving will help them to improve their skills related to the job they are doing in their work environment. It is critical to differentiate between information that is "nice to know" and information that is "need to know." Adults will strive to learn skills that they see as being able to help them do their job more effectively and satisfyingly.

When educators plan their offerings, experimenting with creative ways to present material can spark interest and increase motivation. Many books and materials are available to help design programs that use games, puzzles, and role playing to increase

participation in educational activities. Things as simple as changing the name of an educational offering to something that stimulates interest and suspense can increase attendance rates.

Following the conclusion of educational sessions, it is essential that staff receive recognition for making the extra effort to attend offerings. Rewards may range from material items such as door prizes, meals, or certificates of recognition to public recognition by managers. Staff need to feel that their extra effort was noted by their supervisors and that the skills they have acquired will benefit themselves, their patients, and their co-workers. Supervisors can reinforce the importance of these skills when they encourage staff to seek out employees that have obtained additional training in specific areas. This action by the manager demonstrates not only to the staff but to the specific employee that the manager respects and values the employee's training and skills.

Motivating staff to attend educational offerings is a joint venture between management and the educator. In many facilities the management may play a dual role and function as a supervisor and educator. No matter who functions as the facilitator of the session, it is essential that new and innovative ideas be utilized to increase the knowledge of clinical staff. Our ultimate goal as educators is to facilitate life-long learning. Adult learners have an intrinsic desire to succeed and will seek out opportunities that will help them meet their goals for self-success. We, as educators, can tap into that intrinsic desire and motivate people to attend educational offerings.

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