



From Burnout to Fired Up: How OR Nurses Reclaimed Their Spark Through Shared Governance

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Introduction

At a large academic medical center facing multiple complex challenges—including the COVID-19 pandemic, staffing a new hospital location, and preparing for the opening of a new 504-bed patient tower—perioperative nurses identified the urgent need to maintain connection and engagement. Rapid changes and mounting pressures significantly impacted morale and threatened nurse retention. With teams spread across different floors and unfamiliar environments, shared governance became a vital platform to restore unity and empower staff voices. The primary goal was to improve morale, foster collegiality, and reduce turnover while supporting perioperative nurses through operational and emotional stressors.

Objectives

To cultivate a supportive, inclusive culture, the OR shared governance implemented imaginative and collaborative team-building initiatives. Activities like bingo, escape rooms, team mixers, scavenger hunts, pumpkin decorating contests, and a hospital version of Family Feud became key tools. Community service events such as volunteering at Howie's House offered opportunities for nurses to connect outside work while making meaningful contributions. These initiatives relieved stress, encouraged teamwork, and reinforced that nurses' contributions and well-being were valued.

Methods

- Success stemmed from collaboration between the Chief Nursing Officer, nursing leaders, and staff through shared governance structures. Four main strategies were implemented:
- Team-Building Events:** Designed to foster collaboration across dispersed units, adapted escape rooms and scavenger hunts promoted problem-solving in a fun, low-pressure setting. These activities created bonds beyond departmental lines and helped nurses build relationships outside routine clinical work.
- Community Service at Howie's House:** Nurses supported families of critically ill patients, fostering bonds rooted in compassion and shared values. This volunteer work promoted teamwork, empathy, and social connection beyond hospital walls.
- SMART Goals Focused on Retention and Growth:** The CNOR certification initiative and "Spring Forward" morale campaign provided clear pathways for nurses to achieve personal and professional milestones. These structured goals addressed development and well-being, increasing job satisfaction and decreasing turnover.
- Inclusive Shared Governance:** Nurses actively participated in decision-making, planning, and engagement initiatives. This inclusivity empowered staff, boosted confidence, and ensured programs reflected actual needs.

Outcomes



Evaluation

Impact was assessed through nurse surveys, retention data, and morale indicators. Turnover rates decreased notably after implementing engagement strategies. Perioperative nurses reported improved teamwork, a stronger community sense, and enhanced trust in leadership. The positive work environment contributed to higher quality care and better team collaboration.

Conclusion

Through creative engagement strategies grounded in shared governance, this medical center successfully navigated the significant stressors of a pandemic, hospital expansion, and geographic dispersion.

These efforts led to:

- improved morale
- lower turnover
- stronger interprofessional relationships
- sustainable model of inclusive leadership that other institutions can replicate

References

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