Managing Professional Practice: Nursing Peer Review

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Problem
• Currently, Sentara Princess Anne Hospital (SPAH) does not have a nursing peer review (NPR) process for nurses to explore professional practice within a just culture framework, improve nursing practice, and ultimately promote patient quality and safety outcomes.
• The major barrier to nursing peer review includes inadequate training for providing honest and constructive feedback.
• Currently, complaints are reviewed by nurse managers as they occur (Figure 1). Patient care issues may not be well documented and individual biases may lead to practice inconsistencies, creating an overly positive feedback process with minimal or no behavioral change component.
• Additional barriers include productivity and fiscal uncertainty, as nurses seek to balance workload requirements with professional practice development.

Background
• Nursing peer review is “a process by which nurses systematically assess and evaluate the quality of nursing care provided by peers, measured against professional standards of practice in a climate of collegial problem solving and a continuous learning environment.”
• Peer review, supported by the American Nurses Association (ANA) since 1972, meets one of the criteria needed to establish nursing as a profession.
• The ANA Code of Ethics, based on Florence Nightingale’s principles, guides nursing practice and reflects the fundamental core values and ideals for individual nurses and as professionals.

Significance
• Peer review demonstrates Watson’s Theory of Human Caring by fostering nursing practice development to improve nursing performance quality and strengthen professional nursing.
• Peer review identifies safety concerns and offers evidence-based solutions, within a shared-governance framework, to promote safe, high quality patient care.
• Peer review operates within a just culture and caring environment, and by design, is non-punitive and impartial so lessons may truly be learned and shared.

Nursing Peer Review Program
• The proposed NPR process (Figure 1) promotes self-regulation of nursing practice (shared-governance framework), maintains high nursing standards through comparison against ANA Code of Ethics and ANA Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice, facilitates patient advocacy, improves nurse satisfaction related to autonomy and decision-making, and improves nurse retention. More importantly, peer review improves patient outcomes through nurse-sensitive indicator monitoring and evaluation.
• A peer is defined as someone of the same rank with knowledge of the nursing discipline and practice environments. Recommendations from peers, based on root cause analysis (RCA), are more likely to be understood and accepted by the nursing staff. Nursing peers truly appreciate what it is like to practice at the bedside and reflect attributes described in Watson’s Theory of Human Caring.

Figure 1. Managing Nursing Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Nursing Peer Review</th>
<th>Current Complaint Review</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multidisciplinary Team</td>
<td>Manager-led</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA/PSACC</td>
<td>Individual bias lead to inconsistencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Improvements</td>
<td>Issues are not always documented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to a bad patient outcome</td>
<td>Lessons learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons Learned</td>
<td>Nursing Peer Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incident Management</td>
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Nursing Peer Review Guiding Principles
The following guiding principles are used to evaluate and improve nursing practice:
• Review processes are focused on nursing practice
• Review processes enable a continuous learning culture of best practice to promote patient safety
• Feedback is not anonymous
• Feedback is timely, on-going, and incorporates the developmental stage of the nurse (from novice to expert)

Nursing Peer Review Referral Process
• Anyone can refer a case to the NPR Committee requesting a review of nursing practice. Components of an appropriate referral are presented in Table 1. The NPR Committee screens completed referral documents to deem appropriateness for further review. If appropriate, the case is opened for review and discussion by the committee. Otherwise, a letter designating the referral a non-practice issue is sent and the case closed (close feedback loop).
• Committee members use a scoring tool to rate the severity of the practice issue. Following review, the NPR committee issues recommendations which are shared using the SBAR communication format. Special emphasis is given to lessons learned, which may be shared with the broader nursing community.

Table 1. Referral for Nursing Peer Review

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Nursing Peer Review</th>
<th>Appropriate Referral</th>
<th>Inappropriate Referral</th>
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<tr>
<td>Conditions impacted by failure to escape chain of command</td>
<td>Performance issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missed opportunities or failure to rescue</td>
<td>Interpersonal conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any affect on patient care requiring increased interventions</td>
<td>Intra-departmental conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any case where nursing care was inappropriate or questionable (controversial)</td>
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Nursing Peer Review Membership
The NPR Committee is a multidisciplinary team of nurses from across multiple specialty areas working at the point of care delivery. The following attributes are required:
• Professional, respected, and trustworthy
• Experienced and proficient in their area of expertise. A minimum of 2 years experience is required.
• Does not work in a RN Unit Coordinator role
• Practices evidence-based nursing and exhibits interdisciplinary collaboration
• Values others and acts as a resource for peers
• Demonstrates evidence of ongoing professional development

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Acknowledgements: Grace Myers, MSN, CNS, RNC-OB, NE-BG; Marybeth Baber MSN, MBA, RN; and Joanne Williams-Reed, DNP, MS, RN-BC, CNS