Ten Steps to Improving Physician-Nurse Relationships
By
Kathleen Bartholomew, RN, MN

Tips for Nurses

1. Always have the chart in hand when calling a physician.
2. Adopt the SBAR tool as a standard of communication – especially telephone conversations.
3. Don’t begin telephone conversations with “I’m sorry to bother you....”
5. Use the progress notes to briefly communicate your key concerns/interventions.
6. Confront physicians whose behaviors are degrading by speaking to them in private. State the behavior and its effect. Ask manager for support if needed.
7. Take the time to thank and acknowledge those physicians with whom you have a good working relationship.
8. Don’t complain about a doctor to other staff. If you have a problem, speak to the physician in private.
9. Raise your awareness. Identify those physician behaviors which belittle or diminish you (one-word answers, no eye contact, interrupting, raised voice, etc.)
10. Further your education by pursuing a BSN or MSN degree.

Tips for Managers

1. Establish a standing monthly meeting with your medical director.
2. Attend scheduled section meetings of physicians.
3. Survey physicians to elicit their needs and concerns.
4. Act as a liaison – bring nursing concerns to physicians as a group and vice versa.
5. Role model collegial physician-nurse interactions. Intervene when necessary in resolving MD/RN issues. Tell staff you are there to support them.
6. Encourage staff to fill out incident reports for disruptive behavior. Reports should not be used as retaliatory, but rather as an opportunity to document the problem and shift the focus to a solution.
7. Sponsor joint education and celebratory events.
8. Be an advocate for standardization. Demonstrate to physician the advantages incumbent in a uniform practice.
9. Be present on the unit when doctors are rounding. Round each week with a different physician.
10. Identify recurrent problems and be proactive. Work with individual physicians to build collegial relationships before a situation escalates.
Tips for Physicians

1. It makes a world of difference to address a nurse by her/his name. If unsure, don’t hesitate to ask – the mere question denotes recognition.
2. Be a leader, not a commander – recognize that your role enables you to create an atmosphere where nurses feel comfortable sharing patient concerns and asking questions without feeling inferior.
3. Be considerate of the nurse-patient interaction when walking into a patient’s room.
4. Discuss the plan of care for complicated patients directly with the nurse – it takes less than 2 minutes to engage the RN and provides an opportunity for education.
5. Participate in joint educational and celebratory events. The ROI (Return on Investment) far exceeds the time/cost - the benefits are tremendous.
6. If you have a problem with a patient’s care, speak to the nurse involved first; then the charge nurse.
7. Invite nurses to round with you. Create a welcoming atmosphere.
8. Recognize the difference in education. Volunteer to give at least two mini in-services a year to staff on your area of expertise or concern.
9. Recognize the nurse’s role at the sharp end: a critical member of the team.
10. Compliment nurses who are doing a great job in public and in private.