

# Partnering with an Ombudsman: A Shared Journey for Team Growth and Improved Job Satisfaction

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## Purpose

The NDNQI RN survey was conducted in October 2009. Our overall unit response rate was 61% with 14 respondents from two ambulatory care clinics. Our Job Enjoyment T score was 62.85 which was lower than our other scores on the NDNQI survey. The goal for this performance improvement initiative was improved communication to foster team work and job satisfaction among the members of one particular team. A project plan was developed with specific timelines identified. According to Kramer & Schmalenberg (2008) "...staff nurses are interested not just in the presence of collaborative relationships, but in the specific attributes of such a relationship that is based on mutual trust, power and respect between parties" (p. 58).<sup>1</sup>

**NPCS Project Plan**

Project/Goal: Participation of all [redacted] at meetings facilitated by the ombudsman to promote team building and improved communication. NDNQI Work satisfaction indicator #2 - Manager Nurse Satisfaction

Lead: Zean Sheeron  
Key Staff: [redacted] Clinical Research Nurses  
Outcome: Improved communication and team work  
Key Stakeholders: CNA's, [redacted] team members, [redacted] staff  
Selected milestones:

Key Project Steps (no more than 10)	Due Date	Done (Y/N)
1. Contact and meet with ombudsman	2/20/10	x
2. Schedule first meeting with the staff and the ombudsman and set goals	2/20/10	x
3. Schedule subsequent meetings and promote participation by all team members	3/20/10 & 4/20/10	x
4. Encourage independent team meetings without management or ombudsman	05/20/10	x
5. Invite ombudsman to working team meeting	06/20/10	x
6. Schedule wrap-up meeting with ombudsman	07/20/10	x
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

Notes on process:  
NCR/Share/Chief Nurse/NPCS Goals/CTOP Project Plan Templates.doc

## Significance

Fostering a work environment where nurses are enthusiastic to work is paramount to the successful functioning of the nursing unit or work group. The necessity for successful communication and healthy group dynamics for positive nursing and patient outcomes was identified. "Safe patient care is directly and positively linked to the quality of staff nurses work environments"(Kramer, 2008, p. 56 ).<sup>1</sup>

## Strategy and Implementation

- A breakdown in communication was occurring within the team
- Interactions among one group of RNs were affecting the functioning of the specific team and the milieu of the nursing unit
- Multiple interventions would work for a time, but eventually a crisis would occur and the team would demonstrate stress and the inability to communicate effectively
- The Nurse Manager realized that additional resources were required and sought the assistance of the ombudsman
- The ombudsman offered facilitation of group problem solving, dialogue and assistance in achieving group outcomes
- An initial meeting was similar to an interview, with all parties deciding if they wanted to participate and the ombudsman deciding if he thought he could intervene with the group.
- Regularly scheduled meetings were held with defined goals, ground rules and a set agenda
- Confidentiality was maintained

## Ombudsman

- An independent neutral person
- Assists in resolving conflicts
- Addresses concerns
- Pursues grievances
- Acts impartially and confidentially
- Advocate for fairness and equality
- Provides a mechanism for early problem resolution
- Considers all sides of an issue in an unbiased fashion
- Promotes better communication
- Helps analyze complex and difficult situations
- Facilitates a just resolution of problems and disputes

Adapted from <http://ombudsman.nih.gov/role.html> <sup>2</sup>

## Ground Rules for Effective Groups

- Test assumptions and inferences
- Share all relevant information
- Use specific examples
- Explain your reasoning and intent
- Focus on interests, not positions
- Combine advocacy and inquiry
- Discuss un-discussable issues

Adapted from Schwarz, R (2002) - p.97



## References

- <sup>1</sup>Kramer, M and Schmalenberg, C, Confirmation of a Healthy Work Environment. *Critical Care Nurse* 2008; 28(2): 56-63.  
<sup>2</sup>NIH Office of the Ombudsman, The Center for Cooperative Resolution. (2010). Retrieved from: <http://ombudsman.nih.gov/role.html>  
<sup>3</sup> Schwarz, M. (2002). *The Skilled Facilitator: Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

## Evaluation

The group work was challenging and required the commitment of everyone in the group to work through the various identified issues in order to improve communication patterns and interactions. The group now meets independently to plan patient care, job satisfaction has improved and the tension on the unit has diminished. The ombudsman was invited to participate in one of the group's planned meetings without the managers being present. This was viewed as a positive experience and helped in the evolution of the working group.

## Implications for Practice

When team work is lacking, job satisfaction is impacted. Identifying available resources to facilitate team work among nursing personnel is important. The Nurse Manager should be knowledgeable about alternate resources, know how to access them and be willing to engage the appropriate assistance. Once accessed it is important to commit to follow through on the proposed strategies and support the group through the shared journey.

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## Contact Information

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