

# Teaching Business Skills to Nurse Managers

Nurse managers should learn more about the business of caring.

**I am a CNO, and I recently asked my CEO what I could do to make myself more valuable to the organization. He suggested teaching “business skills” to the nurse management team. How can I do this? What types of business skills would be useful for them?**

**Sanford:** Today more than ever, it is important that nurse managers understand the business of health care. Quality of care and patient safety are strongly affected by the business side of health care, and vice versa. Nurse managers need to learn to appreciate the relationships between those elements. Conducting a needs assessment of business skills, such as budgeting, capital planning, and expense management, is a great way to determine key focus areas for business education.

One way to help nurse managers expand their business acumen is to encourage them to earn advanced degrees. Many MBA programs now include sections on health care, and many master’s in nursing programs are beginning to incorporate more business elements. A master’s in healthcare administration can also provide a broader perspective on the healthcare system as a whole. While it isn’t crucial for a nurse manager to have an advanced degree, it is a necessity for those who may be interested in becoming a CNO. You might consider setting up a target for the percentage of managers on your team who have earned advanced degrees.

You can also offer a number of initiatives in-house to help your managers learn more about the business of health care. First, it can be helpful to work with your finance department to develop a glossary of commonly used finance terms. Include a general definition of the term, as well as information on how the term is used in your hospital. This glossary might also include terms and acronyms specific to your organization. (Consider develop-

ing a similar document with clinical terms for the finance staff as well.)

Another option is to work with your CFO and other finance staff to develop in-services on finance issues and the interrelationship between business and patient care. These programs could be open to staff nurses, too. The in-services might also be developed into a series of handouts or courses that nurse managers and staff nurses can take online.

Nurse managers may not be comfortable sharing their lack of knowledge about a particular business subject with other team members, so it’s important for leaders to work individually with their direct reports to assess their needs and craft development plans that address knowledge gaps. This can be a topic of a regularly scheduled one-on-one meeting with direct reports.

Finally, consider starting a journal club, in which important articles are distributed to key managers who then meet to discuss them. My organization is about to begin using *The Business of Caring* for this purpose, purchasing subscriptions for our middle managers and then bringing the group together each month to talk about the articles. The CFO and CNO will attend these meetings to help clarify any issues that participants do not understand and to gain a better understanding of the issues that concern middle management. We expect these meetings to be a great way to begin breaking down the “silos” that tend to keep the clinical and financial sides of health care separate.

---

This article is reprinted from the June 2007 issue of *The Business of Caring*. Kathleen D. Sanford, RN, MA, DBA, FACHE, is past president of the board of directors of the American Organization of Nurse Executives and senior vice president and chief nursing officer of Catholic Health Initiatives.

## Using *The Business of Caring* as a Teaching Tool

Here are a few ways to use *The Business of Caring* in educating your nurses and clinicians about the business side of health care:

- > Use articles and charts in *The Business of Caring* to develop manager orientations and education sessions.
- > Start a journal club among nurse managers, during which important articles from *The Business of Caring* are distributed to key managers who then meet to discuss them. The CFO and CNO might attend these meetings to help clarify any issues participants do not understand and to gain a better understanding of the issues that concern middle management.
- > Make business education a standing agenda item at nursing leadership meetings. Use *The Business of Caring* as a jump off point. For instance, ask nursing leaders to discuss the topics covered in each issue of the newsletter. Or ask a nurse manager to dig deeper into one of the topics and present his/her research at the leadership meeting for all to learn.
- > Invite your CFO or financial analysts to nursing meetings to discuss topics covered in *The Business of Caring*—and to answer questions nurse leaders might have.
- > Post educational articles from *The Business of Caring* (such as “The Business School for Nurses” section) in employee locker rooms or break rooms so staff nurses and other clinicians can start to learn about business concepts.