



From Your ANA President

One giant leap

By stepping into the world of staffing, you can evaluate and embrace all that makes up staffing composition.

MANY OF US MAY BE TOO YOUNG to remember the original broadcast of Neil Armstrong landing on the moon, but we all know how significant it was for us—not just as a nation, but as a world community. Before the moon landing, do you remember hearing about others' perceptions or theories of what the moon would look like? Would it contain water or the basic carbon footprint of life? We had no answers to these questions until we landed on the moon and had a chance to study and evaluate it. It was a new journey for the human race.

Nursing has been on a similar journey. We have our perceptions of what nursing is like or what it's made of. But until we study and evaluate it, we don't really know its composition. What's your perception of what constitutes nurse staffing or exceptional nursing care (besides having sufficient staff)? Have you truly evaluated and embraced what we've learned so far—that various factors, such as nurse education and the work environment, affect staffing and patient outcomes?

ANA's National Database of Nursing Quality Indicators® (NDNQI®) provides the "genetic" make-up, so to speak, of what comprises staffing. It tells us not just the number of staff, but the type of staff, its educational level, satisfaction level, and the work environment. To use such data effectively, the staff nurse needs to be more involved in their evaluation, analysis, and use.

NDNQI has been used to help staff and employers improve the work environment. In one hospital, for example, the team of staff nurses and nurse managers evaluated the RN survey results and identified how to improve nursing satisfaction by addressing multiple aspects of the environment, such as reward and recognition, career-path opportunity, and front-line leadership support. They succeeded not only in improving satisfaction scores but also in reducing nurse turnover and vacancy rates.

At Poudre Valley Hospital in Colorado, NDNQI has been a powerful tool in improving patient and staff outcomes. Donna Poduska, RN, states, "Staff and management love having benchmarks and consistent definitions. They like being compared, apples to apples. It

has made them work harder and really have quality as the driver of patient care." At her hospital, all nurses were involved in data evaluation, not just a handful of nurses.

Staff nurses have the opportunity to influence and change their work environment as well as improve nursing and patient outcomes—but they need access to the data so they can offer their own perspectives and be part of the solution. Expecting them to do this without giving them access to the data would be like telling the astronauts they need to provide concrete evidence on the moon's composition while viewing it through a telescope. Making the case for any type of staffing or workforce decision requires the necessary data, so as to make it an informed decision.

The Third Annual NDNQI Data Use Conference, *New Horizons in Quality Care*, is scheduled for January 21 to 23, 2009 in Dallas, Texas. Topics include how high-reliability organizations undertake organizational change, how quality data are used to improve nurse staffing and patient outcomes, how nursing processes improve patient outcomes, and how the RN survey data can help improve the nursing work environment. We will have such distinguished speakers as Dr. Linda Aiken, Dr. Diane Boyle, and Dr. Caryl Goodyear-Bruch. For more information about the conference, please visit www.nursingworld.org. You don't want to miss out on hearing about the latest in high-quality care.

Landing on the moon is still an exciting concept, and an experience that very few people have been privileged to have. We're fortunate in that stepping into the world of staffing isn't limited to the very few. I encourage you to take that giant leap, to truly step into this world and evaluate and embrace all that makes up staffing composition and understand how you can use this information to make a better world for our patients and staff.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca M Patton RN".

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President
American Nurses Association