

Perioperative Nursing: Advocacy for Our Patients Through Best Practice Initiatives

Paving the way for nursing back in the 1800's Florence Nightingale was an advocate for patients and families. She promoted equal human rights regardless of gender, social status, or religion, and thereby laid the foundation for nurse advocacy and the expectations that nurses would advocate for their patients. (Sundqvist, p. 17)

According to the Operating Room Nurses Association of Canada Standards (ORNAC, 2017) one of the essential qualities of the perioperative registered nurse is to be an advocate for the patient and the family. (p.40) I have been a perioperative nurse for 16 years. During this time my colleagues and I have interviewed and advocated for many patients. We listen thoroughly throughout our interview, we feel their nervousness, and determine their needs all while going through the nursing process. We offer our hands, a warm blanket, a box of tissue, and pull the blinds down in the rooms to provide comfort and dignity for our patients.

Imagine coming in as a patient for a procedure/operation and trusting strangers with your well being. You are unfamiliar with your surroundings and what to expect. Imagine how nervous you would be and how vulnerable you would feel. Frightening to say the least. I, myself have been a patient in the operating room five times. I recall being wheeled down the hall thinking "what if I don't wake up". I remember having tears and looking up at my anaesthetist and saying please make sure I wake up. I knew him and trusted him yet I still had to say it out loud. I remember having a spinal operation and thinking how over weight I felt and worried my colleagues would see me totally exposed. I was embarrassed and frightened but they made sure I had warm blankets, that the blinds were drawn, that there were only females in the room, and offered their hand as I drifted off to sleep. I felt protected and my insecurities diminished as I went off to sleep because I knew they would advocate for me.

In the role as Operating Room Nurse Educator, I've watched and listened as my colleagues walk down the hall to my office or my manager's office to say they felt like they needed to represent or speak on their patients behalf. We've helped them navigate the proper channels to advocate professionally for their patients by providing resources such as the ORNAC Standards and our own hospitals Intraoperative Standards.

Perioperative nurses are the voice of the patient and their family. We have the patient's best interest at heart and are there to preserve human values such as dignity, respect, and safety. By incorporating our Surgical Safety Checklist and the Nursing Process we can advocate properly for the operative patient and their family. I work in the little city of Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, and I can honestly say I work with a group of professional perioperative nurses that I know first hand are the most diligent advocators for their patients and their families.

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