Healthcare leaders today are challenged with increasing uncertainty related to evolving demographics, economics, and public policy. Additionally, shifts in case and payer mix, slowing price growth, and cost pressure threaten the financial stability of their organizations. Healthcare systems have become more complicated with the intricacy of care delivery requiring seamless adoption of new systems and technologies. Today’s environment in health care is increasing the demand for cost-effective and innovative strategies in the management of patient care, creating opportunities for holistic nurses.

Why Are Healthcare Leaders Looking for New Strategies?
Healthcare executives are shifting their focus on managing population risk. Legislation requires not-for-profit hospitals to demonstrate a positive impact in community benefits for the population served. Hospitals can achieve their community benefit requirement through community health promotion, education, charity care, or other activities. This mandate requires not-for-profit hospitals to conduct a community health needs assessment at least once every three years as well as develop implementation plans to address identified needs within the population (Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 2010).

Additionally, Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) are forming across the nation to improve patient-centered care quality and to control costs within and across settings (National Quality Forum, 2012). ACOs are organizational alliances that seek to integrate effective care coordination with accountability, incentives, and quality measurement. Ideally, patient and family-centered care coordination integrates shared plans of care among all relevant providers and through episodes of care in multiple settings. Healthcare leaders are required to develop strategies for measuring diversification of services to non-emergency services and increasing their outpatient services to impact access in rural areas (Hamby, Housman, & Parker, 2010). As innovators, healthcare leaders of the future will need to excel in strategic planning to thrive among the external influences driving change. They will need to find smarter, more efficient, and cost-effective ways of delivering health care.

Change Brings Innovative Strategies for Health Systems Management:

Shifting and Emerging Roles for Holistic Nurses

by LOURDES LORENZ DHA-abd, MSN-IH, RN, AHN-BC, NEA-BC
Also, as more hospitals choose strategies that incorporate the addition of new outpatient care centers, finding creative ways to offset clinical personnel shortages becomes essential. Many advance practice nurses are placed in these settings to minimize the need for more primary care physicians. Strategies need to be in place to ensure that there are sufficient clinical personnel available for the projected growth. Hospitals that successfully emerge out of staffing crisis demonstrate a deliberate and exceptional focus on the well-being of nurses. One way to manage this challenge is to emulate models used for retaining and recruiting nurses in best practice hospitals. Reviewing the evolving body of academic literature tying patient outcomes to specific nurse staffing variables (ratios, education, experience, etc.), hospitals are increasingly challenged to balance ideal investments in care quality with real world nurse labor constraints.

Nursing is our nation’s largest healthcare profession with more than 3.1 million registered nurses nationwide forming the largest single component of hospital staff (AACN, 2011). Nursing also represents the discipline most traditionally associated with holistic care approaches. In view of the national and local challenges faced by nurse recruitment and retention coupled with escalating chronic disease and an increasingly older population, healthcare transformation best begins by giving the tools of holistic care back to nurses. At your organization, this may mean implementing holistic nursing practices and creating an innovative program in the outpatient setting for better managing population health risks. Hospitals have unprecedented challenges and opportunities for delivering the best patient care at the lowest cost while increasing patient and nurse satisfaction. Healthcare leaders have come to realize that developing new and innovative ways to promote nursing job satisfaction will reduce turnover rates and enhance the patient experience. Engaging the nursing staff is the ideal mechanism to utilize for incorporating holistic nursing practices into your current health system.

**Why is Holistic Nursing the Answer?**

As holistic nurses, we see patients from a whole-person perspective and have the opportunity to make their experience exceptional through our practice. In the inpatient clinical setting, holistic nurses have the opportunity to offer aromatherapy, guided imagery, breath work, massage, and other complementary therapies to a variety of patients across the spectrum of care. In the outpatient clinical setting, we have the ability to promote wellness and engage patients in their own self-care.

Traditional wellness activities focus on basic physical fitness and nutrition. A person is considered well if they are free of illness or disease. However, holistic nurses recognize that wellness is a lifelong journey towards optimal health. It is an ongoing process that involves personal time and commitment. While physical health is important, it is only one dimension of wellness. We realize that multiple dimensions complement and interact with each other, including the physical, mental, occupational, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of wellness.

Holistic nurses are standing at the precipice of leading innovation in our healthcare system in the inpatient and outpatient settings. New roles are emerging that include care coordination, nurse navigators, and nurse coaches. The current climate in health care has created opportunities for us to finally shift our roles in the inpatient setting for enhancing the patient’s experience, while also shifting the focus in the outpatient setting from disease management to a health creation model. Let’s welcome this change with open arms and start preparing for a bright future of holistic nurses leading patients and organizations towards whole-person wellness!

**References:**


Lourdes Lorenz, DHA-abd, MSN-IH, RN, AHN-BC, NEA-BC is the CEO of the International Integrative Health Institute (IIHI) in Asheville, North Carolina. Prior to working at the IIHI, she created and implemented an Integrative Health department that provided inpatient and outpatient services at a large Level I Trauma hospital in Asheville. She has been an RN for 32 years with extensive experience in critical care and healthcare administration, and is currently working towards her doctorate in Healthcare Administration. Lourdes is a well-known national speaker who promotes holistic nursing, Integrative Health, and evidence-based complementary modalities. She has published numerous articles, and most recently a manual for Integrating Healing Touch in the Clinical Setting. Lourdes currently serves on the AHNA Board of Directors. In September 2011 she was appointed to the American Nurses Association Congress on Nursing Practice and Economics and co-authored the position paper on The Value of Care Coordination.