CREATING A HEALING ENVIRONMENT: SILENCE IS HEALING

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Introduction: Kaiser Permanente Oakland Eastbay has adopted Caring Science as the theoretical framework to guide nursing practice (Watson, 2008). It is imperative that we include the Human Caring Theory in all aspects of care that we provide to our patients. Noise is an environmental stressor that is known to have physiological and psychological effects (Choiniere, 2010). Research clearly shows that hospital noise levels exceed noise level recommendations and has the potential to increase complications in patients. What is less known is the effect hospital noise has on nurses (Choiniere, 2010; Twiss, 2011). Nurses who spend the majority of their career in hospitals may experience a significant burden from excessive occupational noise levels (The Inhospitable Hospital: No Peace, No Quiet, 2008).

Significance: Prolonged and excessive exposure to noise stimuli can lead to sleep deprivation, anxiety, stress, tachycardia and elevated blood pressure, thereby ultimately affecting patient safety. As caring energy is depleted, nurses lose the art of caring for the patient as well as themselves (The Inhospitable Hospital: No Peace, No Quiet, 2008; Twiss, 2011). When nurses treat themselves with loving-kindness, personal positive consciousness can bring calm and balance to the environment. Caring consciousness radiates in ever-widening circles from self, to other, to community (Watson, 2008). Caritas Process™ #8 influences the creation of a healing environment for the physical and the spiritual self, which respects human dignity.

Purpose: The purpose of this project was to educate staff on Watson’s Theory of Human Caring, the value of self-care, and to create specific practices to facilitate the practice of loving-kindness for self and others, thus creating a healing environment (Watson, 2008). Staff will be educated on the physiological and emotional effects of noise congestion and encouraged to co-create strategies to reduce environmental noise. Noise is evaluated through patient satisfaction surveys and by measuring the noise by sound level meters.

Setting and Participants: The project setting was the 7th floor at Kaiser Oakland, California (MS7), a fast-paced Medical-Surgical and Orthopedic unit. It is a 38-bed unit with approximately 100 staff members, including nurses and nursing assistants and other healthcare support staff. The noise campaign was started on all shifts, but measurements were taken on the day shift.

Project Description: Various practices were created to enhance noise reduction and creating a healing environment. These included:

- Quiet cards encouraging staff to use low speaking voices.
- Large banner hung, advising “Silence is Healing” and honoring quiet time.
- Sharing of caring moments during the shift in conjunction with breathing exercises to release stress and reenergize with positive energy.
- Wednesday’s the staff wears a T-shirt’s with the logo “How’s the noise level”.
- Hall lights are flickered quickly to remind the staff to bring down the noise level.
Project Outcomes: The impact of the project has brought awareness to the staff and the noise level has been reduced as measured by the HCAPS score. The scores have improved by 12%. This project has been a huge success. Ancillary staff, such as Environmental Services and physical therapists, has asked to be included in the project. The initial T-shirts were purchased by MS7, but Senior Leadership agreed to purchase an additional 100 T-shirts for staff and ancillary staff.

By relating the Caritas Processes™ to work and compassionate care, and partnering with patients, family and staff, the staff has begun to make the association that silence is healing, thereby reducing the noise level.

Project Evaluation: The plan for the future is to continue to share the patient satisfaction survey scores and educate the staff about the effects of high noise levels in hospitals which can potentially contribute to stress and burnout in hospital staff, reduce speed of patient wound healing, and negatively affect verbal communication, influencing increased numbers of medical errors.

Future Direction: Implement a SHHH (Silent Hospitals Help Healing) program to recognize hospital staff and/or departments that excel at providing and maintaining a noise free environment.

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References: