

# CREATING A SHARED GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR DIVERSITY

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While much has been written in the literature about the importance of incorporating diversity initiatives into nursing practice, less has been written about methods to actually do so. Nurse leaders at the University of North Carolina Hospitals (UNCH) used the evolution of its shared governance model as an innovative way in which to spotlight the importance of these initiatives. Shared governance elements have been in place for many years at UNCH but in 2007, staff nurses voted to move from a nursing congress model, in which every unit had one representative on a central committee, to that of a council structure comprised of representatives from different service lines and clinical ladder levels. Much thought was given to aligning the new configuration with the UNCH nursing mission statement: *The mission of nursing at the University of North Carolina Hospitals is to be a leader in providing compassionate, quality care focusing on the unique needs of patients and their families.*

During the transition to a council structure, members of the nursing leadership team and direct-care staff nurses continued to explore ways to incorporate diversity components throughout the councils. UNCH is fortunate to work in partnership with the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill School of Nursing (SON). In keeping with its innovative work, UNC-SON employs a full-time administrator/faculty position—the director of multicultural affairs—who is devoted to guiding efforts to conceptualize, define, assess, nurture

and cultivate diversity and inclusion as an institutional and educational resource for the school. Only a few schools of nursing in the country have such a position. This position, currently held by article co-author, Dr. G. Rumay Alexander, EdD, RN, also serves as the special assistant to the chief nursing officer (CNO) on multicultural affairs at UNCH. To take full advantage of our partnership, the special assistant on multicultural affairs provided consultation to the shared governance steering committee to infuse cultural relevancy into the most important aspects of our work and team efforts during this process. Through this working relationship, the steering committee came to better understand the issues and implications of our diversity work. Together, the committee decided unanimously to incorporate diversity elements into all of our shared governance work as well as to create a separate diversity council within our shared governance structure (Figure 1).

A mission statement for the diversity council was created: *The nursing diversity council provides support for the development and implementation of diversity initiatives within nursing, and works to foster a respectful, culturally appropriate environment for patients, families and staff members.* In addition, the council's purpose was defined to:

- promote a respectful health care environment that values the incorporation of culturally relevant care for our patients, their families and our care-givers;
- establish yearly goals for diversity initiatives;
- collaborate with the professional development council to provide a framework for the educational plan in regard to diversity initiatives;
- develop policies and procedures aligned with the goals and initiatives of the council;



Figure 1. UNCH Shared Governance model

- integrate the diversity initiatives with the hospital plan; and
- review data (such as the employee opinion survey, patient satisfaction survey, hospital and patient demographics, etc.) to assess efficacy of diversity initiatives and incorporate the data to develop action plans.

The current diversity council consists of 18 members including the associate CNO, clinical nurse education specialists, nurse managers and staff nurses representing several clinical levels from the various hospital inpatient and outpatient service lines. Ex officio members on the council include representatives from pastoral care, human resources and the special assistant to the CNO. The diversity council meets two hours a month, eleven times per year and holds an annual four-hour retreat. Additional time is spent by council members working on yearly goals and other diversity projects.

## The Process of Examining Diversity

Each month a council member is charged with bringing a diversity activity to the monthly team meeting. This practice was originally started by the special assistant to the CNO, but the responsibility is now shared by everyone on the diversity council. This activity can take the form of a research article, an interactive/participative endeavor in which

all the council members take part or some other creative method to guide and examine practice and norms. There have been many robust, productive discussions as a result of this forum.

Since all encounters are cultural encounters, diversity council members embark on a journey of self- and organizational-awareness about the real life experiences of people and the often invisible impact these experiences can make on everyone. With the guidance of our diversity expert, practical opportunities such as exercises, scenarios and diversity activities are performed by council members to help identify hidden biases and understand how these biases can impact staff and other relationships. Diversity council members then share these experiences with their individual units/service lines to help other staff members recognize and discuss similar issues. In addition to disseminating new information and skills, council members are also responsible for gathering input from their colleagues to bring back to the group for ongoing discussion and yearly goal setting and program development. Members of our diversity council also serve as role models and consultants for their peers.

### Putting Diversity to Work

In partnership with the UNC School of Nursing, the diversity council hosts an annual presentation and reception at the hospital with the school's Ethnic Minority Visiting Scholar. This lecture series was established at the school of nursing in 2000 as an initiative to highlight the research and contributions of ethnic minority nurse scholars. The lecture brings outstanding specialists, educators, clinical researchers and directors to Chapel Hill for discussion of timely nursing matters affecting ethnic and minority populations.

In 2008, the diversity council surveyed the nursing staff to identify their specific areas of concern or interest. Utilizing survey results, the council

planned a day-long conference for nurses on the topics of greatest interest. In October 2009, the council sponsored UNCH's first diversity conference. This full-day symposium explored various issues such as gender and generational differences, perceptions of pain across cultures and perceptions of cross-cultural nursing staff. The meeting also included a panel discussion on the experiences of non-English speaking families at UNCH. The evaluations were overwhelmingly positive and the conference is now an annual event.

Over the last few years the diversity council has been a busy and productive team with an impressive list of accomplishments. The group co-sponsors the hospital's annual multicultural fair and maintains a reading and movie list on its web page which depicts diversity in various dimensions, including traditions, culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and frame of reference. The council also produces a diversity brochure with a list of available resources and has developed an online diversity calendar.

The council's exploration of innovative methods to introduce nursing as a career to minorities and underrepresented groups led to working with local Boy Scout troops. Council members designed and hosted a daylong program at the hospital that not only assisted the scouts in meeting their medicine merit badge requirements, but also presented nursing as a career to a group of young men, most of whom had never before considered this avenue. In fact, on a survey that was administered to the group beforehand, 14 of the 14 attendees indicated that nursing was not a career they would consider for their future. However, after touring UNCH and talking to male nurses in many units, 13 of the scouts said they would include nursing as a possible career choice. Many of them were quite impressed watching a

flight nurse in action taking off from the roof of the hospital in a helicopter!

### Diversity Council Beneficial to Staff, Patients and Families

The UNCH nursing diversity council has proven to be an influential, yet non-threatening entity to incorporate the functional definition of diversity and inclusion into people's daily life. It has become a valuable resource that can be leveraged to enhance elements of culturally relevant care for patients and families as well as increase knowledge and education on these topics for staff members. In addition, the collaborative work on this initiative has strengthened the relationship between hospital nursing leadership and the school of nursing faculty. Both parties agree that this innovative approach to a shared governance model has benefited patients, families and staff, and would highly recommend the inclusion of a diversity council to those seeking ways in which to focus on diversity elements in their shared governance structure.



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