

Why Not Just Any Nurse Can Be a Nurse Informatician

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Embracing the unique technology-driven clinical contributions to nursing practice that only nurse informaticians can provide demands that nurse leaders at all organizational levels lock arms to take three definitive steps towards advancing patient care and the practice of the nursing profession.

- First, nurse leaders must select a properly educated and skilled individual for the critical role of nurse informatician (NI).
- Once the nurse has been selected, the nursing organization will need to standardize its clinical practice around a universally accepted taxonomy and nomenclature if it is to leverage the data analysis and clinical intelligence that a nurse informatician can deliver to the organization.
- Finally, nurse leaders will need to immerse themselves in acquiring the knowledge required to thoroughly evaluate and understand the technical innovations brought to them by vendors of information technology.

Transforming the patient care landscape requires that nurse executives step forward and lead the industry to accept, on a universal basis, a single nursing taxonomy and nomenclature. For too long, healthcare leaders from all disciplines felt the need to invent their own taxonomies and nomenclatures, each of which enjoyed a limited use. As a result of this siloed approach, no single unified view of nursing data is possible – even now. This deficiency negatively affects patient care certainly, hamstringing the profession’s ability to be taken seriously by healthcare executives not steeped in nursing practice. While this situation is defeating today, it is even more limiting when you examine the future for a profession that cannot

create, disseminate and promulgate clinical research – all because it lacks a universal language-coded methodology to describe what it does and why it matters. Secondly, how can we expect non-nurses to understand, appreciate and value the role of the nurse informatician when, for the most part, we do not understand it ourselves? How many organizations tap the early adopter nurse who has “all the gadgets” to be the nurse informatician? And what about those nurse leaders who choose the nurse clinician steeped in evidence-based practice as the nurse informatician? Basing this mission-critical decision on a personal interest in technology or even a sound clinical foundation is not only flawed; it shortchanges the value that true nurse informaticians bring to nursing practice – the ability to bridge the complex disciplinary triad of computer science, information technology and nursing science. The best choice for nurse informatician will always be the nurse who can traverse those three distinct disciplines with ease, taking what is needed from each and weaving it into clinical practice. In my view, the role of nurse informatician requires not only deep expertise in each of the three disciplines but the collaboration and negotiation skills of a global peacekeeper as well.

Thirdly, while nurse executives can delegate day-to-day responsibility for clinical information systems to a skilled nurse informatician, they cannot and should not abdicate their professional responsibility for understanding technical innovation – ever. Clearly, they are responsible for the societal and technological trends, issues and new developments as they relate to nursing. It is now, and will always be, the responsibility of the chief nurse executive to understand what technology providers offer and how these information systems can advance or stymie their mission-critical objectives. This understanding must extend beyond a “laundry list” of capabilities to a true comprehension of technology-enabled capabilities related to predictive data modelling, enterprise abstraction, vision theories and business acumen, as well as the science and art of nursing practice.

Informed nurse executives who take these responsibilities to heart and acquire the knowledge needed to lead their organizations into a technology-enabled clinical environment will find themselves rewarded, not just in their home organizations, but by the profession as well. The future of the nursing profession rests in their hands.

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