



Franciscan Hospital for Children is located in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston and is the largest pediatric rehabilitation facility in New England. The hospital offers a variety of programs and services that help address the medical, behavioral and educational needs of children. Franciscan works to continuously improve services and programs to ensure that the quality of life for each patient - and their families - continues to progress.

Before Mary Lou Kelleher became Vice President of Nursing at Franciscan Hospital for Children 12 months ago, the hospital ran its nursing program much like any other facility would. Nursing assignments were based on location regarding “convenience of steps,” meaning a nurse would often have different patients. Through exit surveys with families of patients, consistent feedback indicated families felt like they didn’t know who was taking care of their child since the rotation was ever-changing. Recognizing the importance of this response from a customer satisfaction perspective, nursing management decided to look more closely at the issue. Upon investigation, it was noted that most of the time, nurse and patient match-ups were made based on staffing availability and operational needs, instead of on the specific needs of each patient.

When Kelleher took over the program she asked her team of nurses one simple question: “What are you most proud of about your practice?” Nurses responded with varied but similar replies, “Our work with the patients.”

Kelleher used that consistent answer as fuel to change Franciscan’s nursing program to better reflect each nurse’s motivation for his or her work. Based on nursing theorist Jean Watson and her, “It’s all about the relationship” hypothesis of caring, Kelleher began developing and implementing a model to reflect nursing’s concrete values and desire to put the patients first.

Kelleher’s relationship-based nursing model centers on creating teams of nurses to care for specific patients. Previously, a rotating nursing schedule kept families from becoming familiar with individual nurses. Nurses didn’t always have the opportunity to really getting to know the individual children for whom they were caring. This familiarity is especially important in a rehabilitation environment where patient stays last weeks or months. Familiarity with the nuances of each child’s needs ensure the highest quality of care. Now, three to four nurses make up a patient team that cares for the child 80 percent of the time. Each team has one Lead Nurse who functions as the “extreme specialist” and the rest of the team is comprised of secondary nurses. The Lead Nurse is chosen based on his or her competencies as they relate to the clinical needs of each child. While the Lead Nurse is not always the primary caregiver, he or she accepts professional responsibility and accountability for his or her patient’s needs by always being aware of what is going on with the patient. He or she works with the team to assure all patient and family needs are met. Patient charts are updated daily by those who take exclusive care of each child.

Kelleher aimed for the new approach to build on Franciscan’s continuity of care and enhancement of patient safety. The hospital is already seeing the positive results. After a year of implementation, the program has received positive patient feedback. Satisfaction survey data reflects that families feel their Lead Nurse personally knows the patient better than in the past. Franciscan anticipates the program will continue to create a better experience for families and even better outcomes for the children they serve. Additionally, the nurses appreciate being able to get to know their patients and enjoy having more consistency and deeper connections with the children.

As patient profiles have changed over time, FHC has realized that nursing models need to be updated to reflect the evolving needs of patient families and staff. Many of Franciscan's patients have complex and very unique medical conditions. This new relationship-based nursing model takes these changes into consideration so that patients receive improved care and hopefully, better health outcomes.

