

Enhancing the Patient Experience

Newsletter Article Sept/Oct 2016



Cathy McJannet

Lisa Golden

On many days at Sharp Chula Vista Medical Center (Sharp), you will find one or more student nurses from Southwestern Community College (SWCC) clocking in for their shift. They check the messages and referral lists for specific requests from patients and staff, to find out who is seeking the unique services these students are at the hospital to provide. These externs are among a small group from the college nursing program, who are recruited each semester to participate in the Integrative Therapies Collaborative (ITC), an innovative program developed collaboratively between the two organizations.

Armed with essential oils, velvety lotions, healing music and healing touch, the students visit each nursing unit, or go room to room, with nurturing intentions. They interact with patients, families and visitors to create a relaxing space in both patients' rooms and the waiting areas of the hospital and cancer care center. "It really creates this wonderful ambiance on the unit with the patients," said Manager of Volunteer Services, Lisa Golden, who oversees the students.

The ITC is an externship program offered as an elective by SWCC. Each semester participating students are provided with an overview of patient centered care concepts and expectations for delivering the "Sharp Experience" to the populations they serve. They also receive basic aromatherapy training and how to play the Moyo drum which is used to provide the healing music. "You don't need any musical background in order to be able to play it," said Lisa. "You can train somebody on it in five minutes," she added with a chuckle.

Students also get an introduction to Healing Touch, because they want the students to become familiar with it, explained Cathy. They use a modified Scudder technique for the hand massage interventions, but don't do a full session unless they have taken a Healing Touch class. After they take the Healing Touch course, they are free to use it where it is allowed, which includes Sharp Healthcare facilities, she added. "This is the part of the program that excites me," she enthusiastically stated. "We are following Janet's dream of having Healing Touch in every home. By teaching it to the students, we are furthering that goal," she added. "The students bring it back to other students, their families and community, plus the patients and their families bring the information home with them.

After orientation, the students are pretty much self directed, though they do require a bit more interface than other hospital volunteers, whom Lisa also oversees.

Students commit to the program for several semesters, which provides continuity, and consistent quality. They are required to clock in 60 hours per semester. They are also responsible for promoting the program amongst their peers.

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Those that sign up might think they can earn an easy “A” by spreading essential oils, giving hand massages and rocking out on a drum they don’t even have to know how to play. The more important result, says Lisa, are the hidden benefits they earn by their participation. Instead of standard clinical courses, they are learning very different skills. “It helps them develop anticipatory communication and empathy,” she noted. It also enhances student communication abilities, teaches them to be more present and reminds them of the importance of self-care, she adds. They often find themselves renewed and refreshed after providing services. Some students in the program sign up afterward to be long term volunteers.

Feedback about ITC from patients put the program in the high success category. “They love it,” stated Lisa. “They find it relaxing and comforting. I think just the interaction with the caregiver on that level – as opposed to someone doing something to them or at them (poking and prodding) – provides comfort for them. It’s such a wonderful experience for them,” she continued. In an effort to quantify the enhanced patient care experience Lisa says they have been doing pre-, and post-therapy surveys. On a point scale of 1-10, the presenting situation improves consistently by 4 points post-therapy, she noted. Areas where patient improvement has been noticed are reductions in stress, anxiety, pain, tension, and insomnia. There is a high satisfaction level from patients when they rate their care experience. Overall they have found the program offerings to be a positive experience. With these integrative therapies, the patients are able to receive comfort without increasing medications. At this point, the ITC program has offered more than 1,000 patient interactions for hand massage, aromatherapy and Healing Touch interventions, Lisa noted.

Iris Vazquez, who was one of the first students to participate in the program, sums up the student/patient ITC experience perfectly: “As nursing students we get so caught up in learning the science of nursing and in perfecting our technical skills that we rarely get the opportunity to actively develop the caring side of nursing. While participating in the ITC program, I felt like I got it...the opportunity to speak to patients, to reach out to those that are in very vulnerable situations, and offer them an alternative modality that brought them some distraction from their daily [hospital] routine. It was amazing how such a small action really change the patient’s day. It is something that I’ll carry with me for the rest of my career and life.”

The impetus for developing the Integrative Therapies Collaborative came about in a unique way. Hospital staff recognized that they were struggling to find volunteers to fill the role of providing integrative therapies. In prior years, nurses were trained in aromatherapy, but considered the service a low priority amongst their list of responsibilities. Though low on the list of tasks, it was important to Sharp’s initiative to become a Planetree designated hospital. Facing the volunteer issue and designation goals, the volunteer program had to get creative.

To fill the roles of providing the integrative therapies, longtime friends Cathy McJannet, Southwest Community College Director of Nursing (and Healing Touch Certified Practitioner/Instructor) and Dr. Caroline Etland, Sharp Director of Nursing, thought this might be a great opportunity to provide student nurses with additional training and experience. They were motivated, so it took them only two or three months to develop an externship curriculum that was offered for course credits. Faculty at SWCC and SCVMC leaders also participated in drafting the program proposal and in June, 2014, the pilot program was launched.

The collaborative efforts of everyone involved in developing the program generated an award winning program for its innovation and community involvement. In 2015, the program they developed earned the Sharp Center of Recognized Excellence Award (C.O.R.E.). The hospital’s way of honoring excellence. The awards program operates under different pillars. ITC won

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under the community pillar. “We worked collaboratively as a team with community members and different departments to get it rolling,” explained Lisa. The ITC program recently submitted an application to be considered for the Hospital Awards for Volunteer Excellence presented by the American Hospital Association. Perhaps by May 2017 another award will be sitting in the Sharp Volunteer offices.

Even though it is an award winner, Lisa stated there were opportunities for the program to improve and expand. New goals being considered are finding ways to improve data gathering on the patient care experience and quantify it better; building mindfulness practices into the program; giving externs more tools, like guided meditation and healing touch.



student nurses from
Southwestern Community College

Article Footnotes:

MOYO DRUMS: Moyo drums are hand made, steel tongue drums. They have pentatonic tuning so all the notes sound great together. No musical ability is needed to play and enjoy a Moyo drum. Listen to a Moyo drum performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjgQZ0Fzv-4>

PLANETREE: Since 1978, the Planetree organization has been a global leader in advancing patient care. Becoming a Planetree designated hospital is an initiative being sought by more and more hospitals. Sharp became a Planetree designated facility in 2014. Learn more about Planetree and their tenets: <http://planetree.org>