Two monologues do not make a dialogue

Jeff Daly

As organisational change and service demand grow, all staff are under increasing pressure and routine daily decisions can become overwhelming. One of the key challenges is allocation of staff to man the operating theatres.

There has to be flexibility within any department and understanding the whole picture and discussing these issues within the team is very beneficial. Critical staffing issues and the resolutions applied are a rich source of learning to use locally and share with colleagues.

If you use a briefing within your list, this gives opportunity to discuss any skill mix issues within the team that can be addressed and provide feedback to management to give them qualitative information for future staffing planning. A proactive approach which could help contribute to staff feeling in control of situations.

It is true that you cannot account for unexpected sickness and this affects any planned allocations that you make. In 2009 the NHS had an annual 10.7 million sickness days at a cost of £1.7 billion (DH 2009a). The Boorman Report (DH 2009a) suggests that if this was reduced by a third, it would be equivalent to 14,900 whole-time equivalent staff - a staggering figure. You can access sickness absence rates which are published by the Health and Social Care Information Centre at www.ic.nhs.uk. April to June 2010 shows a reduction in comparison to 2009 but there are marked variances between staff groups and regions. The report also recommends that NHS managers have robust engagement and health and well-being plans for staff. The management of daily staffing issues must feature high on the wish list of all perioperative staff. I do not underestimate the challenges that staffing presents to all perioperative colleagues and the wide range of issues that will affect their views and priorities. Personally contributing to any discussions to pre-empt and prepare for staffing issues, if they arise, is validating the importance of communicating and engaging frontline staff in managing care for patients.

Communication is everything!

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References
Association for Perioperative Practice Staffing Policy Template Available from: www.afpp.org.uk/careers/Standards-Guidance
Policy Template
The AfPP staffing policy template was designed to give a basis for safe practice and is a well quoted resource for this issue within the perioperative community. However, is it embedded within your organisation? Can you access it and use it as a benchmark for critical discussion? Do you and your managers review the department skill mix as surgery and skills of staff change? It could prove a useful tool to instigate this discussion and help you contribute to the staffing issues that confront departments every day and perhaps help your department to formulate a 'plan B’ that staff can access and be more in control of situations when they occur. All staff working in theatres want to ensure that patients are cared for safely.

A fPP know through feedback, that there are members experiencing the challenges of staff resources. These circumstances can be unforeseen and when they think skill mix and numbers are wrong, they feel helpless as time is so limited to resolve it and surgery invariably progresses.

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