

Interview with Carol Huston

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Lisa Bonsall: Hi, this is Lisa Bonsall, Senior Clinical Editor for Lippincott NursingCenter. I'm here at the Lippincott Nursing Education Innovation Summit. Right now I have the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Carol Huston. We're going to talk about innovation and leadership.

Carol Huston: Thank you for inviting me here.

Lisa Bonsall: Dr. Huston, how and why should nurses think about innovation as part of their required skillset?

Carol Huston: I think when you think about work environments, there's probably no work environment that's more dynamic than health care. And when you look at the kinds of change that have occurred in health care over the last couple of decades, it is absolutely monumental. So I think it's really important for nurses to know and understand innovation because not only are they part of a team that's going to be initiating and carrying out change, they're often the leaders of that team.

Lisa Bonsall: Can you talk about the role of innovation with critical thinking, problem solving and decision making skills?

Carol Huston: I think that we often neglect to realize how critical having well-developed decision making skills is for nurses. It's absolutely critical to nursing success. When I look at the need for change and whether we're talking about change for a specific patient, organizational change, change for a health care system...nurses have to be at the forefront in leading that change. So they have to be able to carry out all the steps of the decision making process, whether it's how they gather data, whether it's how they analyze that data, or whether or not they're able to be culturally relevant.

In looking at that kind of data, selecting a number of possible alternatives, and then really being critically evaluating which alternative has the greatest likelihood for success. So if you're going to be a change expert and lead a planned change, you have to be able to make sound decision making. You also have to learn how to elicit knowledge and expertise from others who may have a different skillset than yourself.

So all of that is... there's absolutely no way to separate out decision making from having the skillset to be a nurse leader and change agent.

Lisa Bonsall: What role does innovation play in nursing leadership?

Carol Huston: I see nursing leadership as the umbrella for nursing innovation. I think that many nurses lack confidence in their ability to lead others. And if you're not confident or you don't view yourself as a

leader, it's very hard to step forward and take the risks that are involved in becoming a change agent or being the person who not only brings forth ideas for innovation, but also carries them out.

Lisa Bonsall: How confident do you think nurses are with their leadership skills?

Carol Huston: I actually think we have a crisis in terms of nurses' confidence about their leadership skills. In fact, as I've traveled the world, one of the constants that I hear is that many, many nurses feel that they're unprepared for the leadership positions that they currently hold. Sometimes it's because they've not had any formal leadership training. Other nurses have had that leadership training, but they didn't really pay attention because they didn't think it pertained to them or they didn't realize how quickly they were going to be asked to assume leadership positions.

And far too often, nurses lack confidence in leadership because it's just not a role that they actually thought that they would ever assume. It's just something that they had to step up to because there was no one else to fill that job. So I think fortunately, most nurses have far greater leadership skills than they give themselves credit for.

But I also believe that for many, they've had to learn those skills the hard way through trial and error.

Lisa Bonsall: Thank you so much.

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