



## Innovations in a Holistic Care Environment: The Planetree Model...

### An interview with Linda Sharkey, MSN, RN

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Linda Sharkey has worked in a variety of acute care settings as a hospital supervisor, nurse manager for reviewers of defense malpractice cases, assistant director and director. In 2003 she joined Fauquier Health System and is Vice President of Patient Care Services/Chief Nurse Executive. She currently serves on the boards of the Fauquier Free Clinic, Piedmont Home Care, and the American Organization for Nurse Executives. Ms. Sharkey received Inova Health System's Manager of the Year and Innovation awards in 2002, was a finalist in *Nursing Spectrum's* "Advancing and Leading the Profession" nursing excellence award in 2007 and received the Planetree Spirit of Caring Award in 2007. She has served in a key position during the planning and implementation of the Planetree model at Fauquier Hospital in Virginia, which is a patient-centered holistic approach to health care. In 2007, Fauquier Hospital became the fifth hospital internationally to become a *Designated Planetree Patient-Centered Hospital*.

We recently talked with Ms. Sharkey regarding the Planetree model and what nurses can do to implement some of the changes that promote this individualized patient care environment.

#### **The Center: Can you explain the guiding principles behind the Planetree model?**

**Ms. Sharkey:** A guiding force behind the Planetree model is to restore autonomy to the patient in making their own healthcare decisions by providing them information. Treating our patients with dignity, respect and providing information needed for patients to care for themselves. Forward-thinking institutions whose physical environments, policies and practices reflect a commitment organization-wide to providing healthcare the way the patient wants it delivered can make changes, such as creating nursing stations with lower walls and counters to promote an environment that is void of barriers. Care partners, whether they are family members or friends, are encouraged to help guide the patient through the hospitalization process and advocate for the patient to care for themselves. Integrative therapies are also used, such as pet therapy, massage and yoga. Community assessments determine the services that are offered.

#### **The Center: What factors influenced your hospital to adopt this model?**

**Ms. Sharkey:** It was the right thing to do for our patients, staff and community to meet their individual needs in a healing environment. In addition, it provides a competitive edge and is recognized by Joint Commission (in the form of a special quality award for exceeding accreditation standards).

#### **The Center: What planning was needed to implement the Planetree model?**

**Ms. Sharkey:** There was a strategic alignment around this philosophy: staff and team retreats were completed and a steering committee was created with staff included. The plan involved a grass roots approach with the staff. During the planning, there was construction so there was an architectural adaptation of this philosophy. For example, all of our rooms are private, with a day bed for family to stay in the room with the patient. There is also a kitchen located on each unit for patients and families.

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## The Center: What has been your hospital's greatest challenge in the planning and implementation of the Planetree model?

**Ms. Sharkey:** This is a total culture change: the Planetree model is woven into everything that we do; it was instinctive for staff to say they 'already do it' regarding incorporating Planetree principles into patient care. The culture change involved saying how we were going to achieve a holistic model: changing visiting hours, upholding patient rights and being there for the patient. It is a never-ending journey.

## The Center: What would you tell nurses about what they can do to implement changes that embrace the Planetree philosophy?

**Ms. Sharkey:** The nursing leaders need to embrace the philosophy and support their staff as they learn about the model. Some of the actions nursing leaders can take are having their staff educated on how the individualized care model improves patient outcomes. In addition, all departments and staff need to engage in adopting the Planetree philosophy since we all play a part in the patient's care.

## The Center: What has been your hospital's greatest challenge in adopting the Planetree model?

**Ms. Sharkey:** Educating all staff on how they are a part of the Planetree philosophy and embracing it. We are all one big team and we need to make sure we can deliver what we say we will deliver.

## The Center: What is your vision for nursing regarding making changes to promote a healthy work environment?

**Ms. Sharkey:** We need to look at the patient as a person with feelings and look at the whole person. Nurses also need to examine how we take care of each other, what nurses do really matters and needs to be recognized. We have a wellness center for staff, and our next step is to create a concierge service that takes care of all of the things nurses do on their days off (groceries, dry cleaning). It's important that we take care of our own staff so that they can take care of our patients, families and community.

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