Understanding Generational Differences to Optimize Healthcare Delivery
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Background
According to American Association of Colleges of Nursing 2017, the population of the United States is rapidly becoming more diverse; health needs are more complex, and significant health professions workforce shortages exist now and will become more acute in the next decade. Given these trends, diversity and inclusion are mission critical for nursing organizations as well as healthcare and higher education institutions. In recognizing diversity, while culture makes a significant impact, studies have also found generational differences influencing the healthcare teams and patient outcomes. There are four generations working within a given team (Millenials, Generation Y, Baby Boomers, Veterans). As nurse leaders, we are challenged to find the similarities within the generations and bridge the gap. Their values, experiences and approach to meeting healthcare needs vary significantly. Using the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Guiding Principles, collaboration between Academia and Practice setting can be essential in preparing next generation healthcare members and experienced professionals to optimize their generational differences.

Objectives
- To identify difference among generational cohorts.
- To understand generational differences to optimize healthcare delivery.
- To educate academic and healthcare nursing leaders on significant factors concerning communication, professionalism/engagement, and nursing code of ethics in the workplace.

Nursing Code of Ethics
While we recognize the difference between the generational cohorts, the one significant commonality that we all hold as nurses, is The Nursing Code of Ethics. There are many excerpts in the Nursing Code of Ethics, we believe the following two excerpts to encompass the foundation of the nursing profession.

- The nurse, in all professional relationships, practices with compassion and the recognition of human dignity and worth that is present in every individual.
- Relationships with colleagues and others. The principle of respect extends to all those with whom the nurse interacts.

Generational Cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational Cohorts</th>
<th>Veterans</th>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Generation Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Face to Face Written</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Technology (email, text)</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Professionalism</td>
<td>Committed Loyal</td>
<td>Reliable Goal Oriented</td>
<td>Work life balance Work to low Career advancement</td>
<td>Perceived as rude Easily frustrated when not valued Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of Ethics</td>
<td>Hard working</td>
<td>Work ethic driven by self worth</td>
<td>Appreciate being involved Relation</td>
<td>May appear unprofessional to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Valued for their wisdom</td>
<td>Be Empowered by leader Support their values</td>
<td>Direct and straightforward Change agents</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations from Nurse Interviews

- Generations
  - Veterans: No veteran member of the workforce identified to interview.
  - Baby Boomers: “I prefer face to face... allows to see nonverbal.” “I am fully Committed to completion of the problem.” “I prefer to work collaboratively with other.”
  - Generation X: “Nurse eat their young.” “I can use different types of communications between generations since I am often in the middle of the team.”
  - Generation Y: “I prefer texting and emails because it’s faster.” “It is challenging when other generations are not up on technology.”

Recommendations
- Provide all generations with a clear organizational vision.
- Provide increased performance feedback to Generation Y employees.
- Use cross-generational team problem solving for all generations that promotes shared work values.
- Use social media and mobile devices to communicate with Generation X & Y.
- Generation X, Baby Boomers, and Veterans are more effective with projects requiring face to face interaction.
- Provide mentoring, including reverse mentoring, to all generations.
- Implement a knowledge-management (retention) system for all generations including the current Baby Boomers generation.
- Utilize Generation X to bridge communication between the Baby Boomers and Generation Y.
- Accept generational differences and leverage the use of technology, communication, mentoring and motivation to bridge the gaps.

Next Step
- Complete video documentary.
- Develop education modules for use in academia and healthcare.
- Additional research to evaluate the impact of generational differences on the workforce, healthcare delivery and patient outcomes.

References

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