

Leadership in nursing: interview assignment



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

One of the qualities in an effective leader is the ability to recognize a need and take action to make that need met. Debt began her nursing career after graduating from West Shore Community College by working briefly in Grand Rapids before settling at MAC in the mid-eighties. She worked as an R. N.. In a variety of settings including Med/Surge and Call. While working in these capacities Dry. Person approached her a number of times about the need to have a rehab program for cardiac patients. This patient population was not being served locally.

Debt would agree with him, saying “ Yes, it would be nice to have a rehab program,” and that would be it. Then in 1990 Debt’s first child was born. At the same time the ICC needed a manager and Debt was filling in as an interim for the department. This position had a very demanding schedule that included weekends, being on call, and rotating shifts. The hospital was not actively interviewing for a ICC manager and what was supposed to be an interim position now did not have a foreseeable end. With a newborn at home, Debt needed more flexibility in her work schedule.

This was the turning point that spurred Debt to take action to meet the needs that were before her. The answer to Debt’s personal dilemma took the shape of creating a cardiac rehabilitation program. Debt could see that working in this specialty would give her the family-friendly schedule she desired. She took the initiative to approach Dry. Person to see if he was still interested in having a rehab program at MAC. He was willing to act as the program’s medical director if Debt wrote and presented a business plan for the department.

Not knowing anything about writing a business plan, Debt collaborated with one of her colleagues and sought additional information from a business professor at West Shore. She worked on the business plan and the necessary presentations to the hospital board on her own time for a year. Due to this and other experiences, Debt believes that a bachelor's degree in business administration is needed to be a manager in the healthcare field. At the end of this long year Debt's business plan was accepted and she was off and running with the new cardiac rehabilitation program.

Debt's schedule now consists of three weekdays, no weekends, and never being on call. The evolution of her career has been a positive experience as she has learned leadership and business skills on the job. Although the department has a supervisor, Debt has been able to run the program autonomously. She uses a "keep it in the family" approach to dealing with staff problems. When there are conflict situations or negative individuals she sits down privately with the involved party to try and resolve the problem. "Going to the supervisor is the last resort," she says.

If a patient is being negative, another staff member will step in to work with that person whose personality is more compatible. When asked what motivates her after almost 15 years, Debt quickly replied "Seeing patients get better in all aspects." The biggest change that has occurred in her department during this time is the median age of rehab clients. When she began, the average age was between 70 and 80. Now the majority are 40 or 50. Debt has had to change the approach of the cardiac rehab program to serve clients who are essentially "healthy people with a heart condition. There are also insurance issues that need to be resolved for these patients

who are not eligible for Medicare. The average length of participation in the program is three months. Patients with private insurance need to work in order to keep it, making it difficult to fully participate in the program.

Medicare patients have their own set of issues, and Debt spends a lot of time trying to work through the red tape and paperwork to coordinate care.

Reducing paperwork associated with insurance problems ranked number one on the list of things Debt felt would make her a more effective leader.

Debt Towns has used her skills as a leader in the nursing profession to pioneer a new department in the hospital she worked in. Not only did she recognize a need, but she was willing to act. When she didn't have knowledge or expertise in an area, Debt was able to recognize that and seek help and advice. Through the years as the healthcare system and patient populations have changed she has adapted to continue solving the problems that she is resented with. These essential leadership qualities are what will insure that Debt Towns will continue to be an effective nurse manager for many more years.