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By Daniel Sean Kaye



New Technology That Helps Nurses Be Nurses

A nurse's time is immeasurably valuable. There are so many things to do for your patients, so much information to learn and so many different ways to contribute to your field. Utilizing your hours and energy to the best of your ability may mean all the difference in the care you provide. Katherine Levine, RN, director of TigrVision Customer Development for TeleHealth Services in New York, wants to make the most of a nurse's precious hours. By doing so, she dedicates herself to making life better for nurses, patients and their families.



This passion to serve people and to improve their health dates back to Levine's childhood, when she would watch her OB-GYN father connecting with his patients. "[My father] was an innovator, always looking for new ways to deliver better care, and he was a dedicated educator, winning teaching awards annually. My father believed strongly that as healers we have to leave the security of what we know to search outside our experience; and that the key to improved outcomes was the sharing of knowledge with caregivers and patients," says Levine. Her father taught her that to effectively educate others, you have to hear their questions, and then think about the best ways to explain ideas that may be obvious to those in the medical field. "This results in a regular reevaluation and refinement of information, processes and procedures," she says.

Levine also feels that being the oldest of six children helped her to develop "a strong connection to the process of healing and care which I was able to put into use often," she says. "Growing up in a large family presented me with unique firsthand experience with a broad range of conditions, ranging from whooping cough, small pox, meningitis, mumps, measles, to concussions, fractures and

Top: Katherine Levine, RN.

Bottom Left: Levine trains nurse educator Tracy Munez on the Diabetic Patient Education Module.

Bottom Right: Levine and Bill Boguniecki, patient relations representative, customize the screen to deliver key patient content information.

motor vehicle traumas. I found good diagnostic skills were a combination of the observation of symptoms and listening to the patient complaints."

The truth is that Levine enjoyed the challenge and the process of healthcare, and didn't shy away from working with people to facilitate their recovery. The healing concept was part of why she found her way to nursing. But the field's virtually unending possibilities made it even more attractive. "Nursing is so vast and limitless that I knew I would never be bored," she says. "Nursing also allows you to take your past experiences and build upon them, which I have tried to do throughout my career." The more you know, the more effective a nurse you can become, says Levine. "Nursing offered a step off into so many areas—hospitals, teaching, public health, home care, clinics, pharmaceuticals and industrial nursing." Levine has always gravitated to critical care areas of intensive care, cardiac care and high-risk obstetrical diagnostics.

She enjoys working for TeleHealth Services. One thing that makes her facility unique, says Levine, is its interactive patient services portal, which improves patient satisfaction and streamlines the working process for nurses. "Over the last several years, healthcare regulatory developments have started to focus the spotlight on clinical accountability and patient satisfaction. Many hospitals are now closely reviewing and seeking to validate the controls over every item that can affect their patient outcomes, financial statements and staffing," she says. The TigrNet hospital interactive education system allows healthcare facilities to provide on-demand patient entertainment, education, care management and communication solutions, she says.

With ever-increasing pressure to provide the patient with the best possible hospital experience, TigrNet offers a home-like Internet browsing experience for patients. From their bedside, they can surf the 'net, check e-mail, make non-clinical requests and schedule hospital resources on a browser that looks and feels like their computers at home. By offering this, the patient experiences greater autonomy and can select services that are traditionally only accessible through the nurse-call button. Also, the nursing staff is free to concentrate more time on clinical tasks.

TigrNet offers a new way for information dissemination to the patient, says Levine. "Television... has a significant role in patient education with its form of presentation and mainstream appeal," she says. Via the system, information is provided on-demand, whenever the patient wants it. Sometimes, when nurses provide important information, patients have a tendency to become defensive and may reject education about their family or their own condition, says Levine, but TV is a neutral medium, she adds. "People do not resent the way a television presents information. Nurses and hospitals can save a great deal of time by utilizing this technology for education purposes. It is a comfortable tool for them to use."

Levine has been at TeleHealth for about two years, after working in client and product development for a medical technology company; in marketing

and sales for The Newborn Channel; as a clinic manager; as an ultrasonographer in a private practice; and in hospital nursing. "TeleHealth was seeking a person that was familiar with computers, sales and marketing, and who was experienced and knowledgeable about nurses and hospital environments; all areas that I have dealt with extensively," she says, adding that she has 15 years of television based systems and health education video content experience under her belt. "Nurses are great at sales and marketing because they are constantly presenting courses of action to patients and persuading them of the right procedures, so I felt it was a great fit for me."

Today, Levine is director of Customer Development, working closely with hospitals and nurses to develop "content." This includes anything from information about hospital services or health education in the form of videos, PowerPoint, PDF and/or Web sites, to areas of stress/pain management, a healing environment for patients and workers, or entertainment as a positive source of distraction. "The development of content may mean working with an educator to develop a hospital specific procedure program or it can mean listening to a staff committee meeting to identify the need and researching sources to find the right solution," says Levine.

Levine sees this content as being the face of the system, the first introduction to the facility. So she tailors the presentations to the hospital's philosophy and community—its staff, patients and administrators. "To provide a hospital with a generic 'vanilla' system will not accomplish the goal. My goal is to shoot for the double chocolate almond/mocha banana split with butter rum sauce, macadamia nuts and dark chocolate sprinkles," she says.

Training is another very important part of Levine's job. "I really enjoy spending time with hospital nurses, helping them use our service effectively. Our product is a technology that really works for nurses, instead of against them. We want nurses to use TeleHealth's portal to facilitate and streamline tasks that can otherwise be cumbersome and time consuming," she says. Training on the system happens often, encompassing such areas as patients and patients/families, sales support, a new system launch, staff orientation or refresher training; and when system upgrades and new applications are added. "In many cases the 'training' is done on a passive basis without even being identified as training," she explains.

In addition to this work, Levine is involved in ongoing studies at the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies, where she pursues her long-time interests in stress management, meditation, holistic healing and communication development. "I try to integrate non-traditional medicine, integrative therapies and Eastern therapeutic approaches into my work, and in my own

outlook on life," she says. "The definition of 'mainstream' medicine changes as society and technology progress. Today, consumer demand drives so much of what and how we do. Hospital administration recognizes the power of the patient as a consumer and strives to meet their expectations," she says. The medical community understands that alternative integrative therapies can compliment and enhance Western medicine, she says.

While there have been many positive changes within the field, Levine says her biggest challenges involve educating consumers and showing patients the importance of being involved with their medical care. "In my experience, younger patients are more likely to conduct their own research online in addition to any professional medical advice. Older patients are more likely to simply follow the doctor's orders without looking deeper into a diagnosis themselves. Part of my job is making the Internet accessible from hospital rooms and usable in a way that a patient of any age feels comfortable using it," she says.



Levine and Boguniecki customize the screen to deliver key patient content information.

Another challenge Levine has to deal with constantly is staffing and retention of nurses. "The nursing demographic is getting older, and not enough new nurses are coming in," she says. "Nurses contribute greatly to patient satisfaction. It's safe to say that staff is always likely to stay with an institution that listens to their issues, understand their needs and proactively provide tools and solutions to improve their working experience and enhance the patient care," she says.

"Though I dislike generalizations, I will say that most nurses are a pragmatic group. They also appreciate tools that are reliable, readily available, improve their function and benefit the patient. In utilizing our system, facilities are addressing workflow management, lack of education and patient education issues," says Levine.

The solution then involves hospitals proactively changing their facilities, creating a better environment for retention. "They recognize that when you have good people, you want to keep them. An interactive education system will in turn benefit your staff by allowing them to grow personally and professionally...increasing employee retention," she says. "When you can demonstrate the value of a system to them, they will incorporate it into their workflow."

The truth is that things have changed a lot for nurses, and will continue to do so. "Nurses today have to be significantly more technology-savvy than they had to be years ago. In the past, nursing was understood to be a non-technical field.

However, utilizing technology is now one of the most important aspects of nursing, as is evident through the rise of the field of Nursing Informatics," she says.

Levine says this reveals another change. "A shift is taking place across the country to Evidence Based Practice. Its value has been demonstrated, recognized and is being readily integrated in patient care. It offers logical and factual data from which trends can be identified and care decisions made," she says. "Magnet is also driving the concept of involving the bedside nurse with gathering research data. They are empowering floor nurses in the process of conducting studies to support Evidence Based Practice decisions."

The power of solid facts validates nursing recommendations and propels positive change, says Levine. "Current nurses need their contributions to be recognized. Nursing students are being exposed to these concepts in school and look to adopt them in their practice. Nurses are experienced caregivers and keen observers who are dedicated to the betterment of the patient. They recognize the strength that Evidence Based Practice and Nursing Informatics provides."

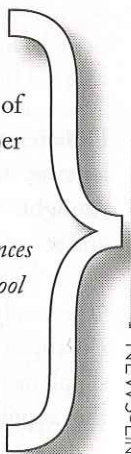
For people entering the field, Levine has words of advice. "Pay attention and look for a need; be a need-based solution," she says.

Some areas of need, according to Levine, include: streamlining process, workflow and applications; improving efficiency; cost-saving initiatives, maximizing applications, systems and tools; identifying new uses; analyzing and reviewing practices for errors and points of failure; developing innovative solutions; improving patient satisfaction; and cross-referencing skills. "Don't feel limited. Your experience is invaluable," she says. "Empower patients and families to be involved in care."

To do this, Levine advises people to avoid the impulse to reject concepts or dismiss information that is new and outside the realm of your experience; to be inquisitive, ask questions and make suggestions; don't be reactive, but stop to consider the options, pros and cons; take a moment to ask yourself why you are doing what you're doing; take yourself out of your own shoes and step into those of the patient or family; and remember that knowledge is power—share it with others.

Katherine Levine, RN, received her undergraduate degree in Arts and Sciences from Mohawk College in Canada, and her RN degree from St. Joseph's School of Nursing in New York.

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