

“Observe, record, tabulate, communicate. Use your five senses. Learn to see, learn to hear, learn to feel, learn to smell, and know that by practice alone you can become an expert”

Sir William Osler

This week’s Departmental Acknowledgement goes to Ann-Marie Suess, Nurse Manager of the Division of Hematology/Oncology. Many of us have worked along side Ann-Marie for several years – a privilege and a pleasure.

Ann-Marie joined the MCH staff in 1983. In 1992 she became the Assistant Nurse Manager for the Day Treatment Centre and in 2001 assumed the role of Nurse Manager for the in-patient and out-patient services of Hematology/Oncology. She is a nursing leader who demonstrates a high standard of integrity and ethical behaviour. Managing our division is not an easy task. We are the only division with an in-patient unit (12 beds) and an out-patient unit with 10 clinics per week. The nursing staff has experienced significant turnover through the years and mentoring young nurses who face children and their families with malignant disease can be both challenging and rewarding. She is passionate in the pursuit of quality care, incorporating a patient and family centred approach. She is a strong advocate for them with a valued set of principles and exhibits professionalism of the highest order. As a colleague said: “She models leadership behaviours such as reflective practice, advocacy and integrity to influence herself and others towards their goals”. Her honest, forthright, gentle but firm, disciplined approach has allowed these young people to acquire a sound knowledge and mature into capable, confident nurses.

Not all the goals facing a manager are achievable. Identifying the complex issues that face the staff, what improvements are needed in the work environment, how to achieve them, how to manage the budget without a major compromise in the care of patients to mention a few has been a challenge. However when decisions are based on a careful, thorough analysis with communication at all levels, people acknowledge and accept the fair and equitable approach that has been taken to reach the decision. A credit to Ann-Marie’s leadership and advocacy for her staff has resulted in a high degree of satisfaction and staff retention. We do lose staff, but for all the right reasons – to improve their knowledge and broaden their experience, having acquired a very solid foundation.

Ann-Marie has provided leadership for many of our external reviews as we experience more of these than any other sector within the hospital. The Children’s Oncology Group (COG); Foundation for the Accreditation of Cellular Therapy (FACT), Health Canada who audited twice, oncology and bone marrow transplantation; Q-mentum – each of these returning with in a cyclical fashion. In addition the Programme Quebecois de lutte contre le cancer required 18 months to prepare the 3 inch tome which resulted in this agency granting its highest grade, 4A, recognizing our excellence in clinical care and research in pediatric oncology. Shortly after this we participated in the Clinical Activities Priority Setting (CAPS) exercise to establish the priorities for tertiary care and research in the future. Pediatric Hematology/Oncology is a high priority for the MUHC. A great deal

of time is required by many people to prepare the material for these audits. However an inspiring, dedicated, respected leader is necessary to bring them to fruition and Ann-Marie has been that person. In addition we were planning the move to the Glen and many of our team participated in this endeavour. The division received an Award of Excellence in recognition of our preparedness, participation and contribution and Ann-Marie rightfully accepted this on behalf of the division as once again she was the major player at the table.

One would think this was more than a full time job with little time for other MCH responsibilities. Not so – she continued her own personal development leading to a Master's degree in 2010. She has worked and continues to do so in labour relations on behalf of the hospital and assumed responsibilities for the Radiology and Medical Imaging Nursing service for a couple of years when there was a need for a well organized, disciplined, skilled manager who would listen and provide constructive guidance to a capable, dedicated team in a time of need.

It has been my privilege to work with some very capable nurse managers over the years, none more so than Ann-Marie. I have learned a great deal from watching and listening to her, being most impressed with her calm, reasoned, careful analytical approach whether she is dealing with a patient and family, an interdisciplinary team, negotiating for a supporting budget, teaching a young nurse, mentoring a more experienced staff member, always done with a little touch of humour in an ethical and professional manner – a nursing leader who is exemplary, dedicated and a model to be emulated.

- Dr. Blair Whittemore