

Maureen Swick, RN, PhD, SVP and Chief Nursing Executive of Inova

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Maureen Swick came to Inova from New Jersey’s St. Peter’s University Hospital, where she was vice president of patient care services. She began her career as a staff nurse at Monmouth Medical Center and has spent more than two decades in a variety of nursing roles of increasing responsibility before joining the Inova Health System. She recently assumed responsibilities as chief executive officer of the American Organization of Nurse Executives and senior vice president, nursing, of the AHA.

How has the nurse’s role changed over the past decade?

Technology has had a tremendous impact – and as a result, nursing’s role has had to become less task-oriented and more centered on patient care coordination. Assimilating all the information captured in the electronic medical records – and applying that knowledge – is critical to providing quality and compassionate care.

What impact has this had on the qualities and experience you would look for in filling a key nursing position today?

At Inova, we now require a BSN – with its emphasis on nursing science, research, delegation and leading teams. Nurses used to focus on the clinical tasks, such as inserting IVs, but in our new care delivery model our clinical technicians do tasks that don’t require a Registered Nurse. We focus on standards of behavior that reflect our philosophy and commitment to quality care. We now perform behavioral assessments when hiring so we have a better understanding of how the candidate will fit with our culture and the team.

What are the biggest challenges for any hospital in delivering quality patient care?

From a nursing perspective, we must have the right person and the right fit. Hiring mistakes are simply too costly in terms of both productivity and the dollars and time we invest in onboarding. Good communication between the physician and the nursing team is also critically important. With the introduction of electronic medical records, the physician can now pull up the information while sitting in the office. There is less face-to-face contact, so it's become far too easy not to talk with each other. This creates a problem with coordinating patient care.

There has been much written over the past few years about the different attitudes and expectations of Baby Boomers vs Millennials. Do you see this as a major issue in health care - and how can organizations best tackle the problem?

The millennials are like fish in water when it comes to technology, adapting quickly to upgrades; the Baby Boomers less so. In fact, many struggle with the new tools we continue to introduce. So for a major upgrade, we trained 200-300 nurses, who also happen to be millennials, to be our technologically savvy nurses -our super users - to help the rest of the nursing team master these new tools. The program was very successful. In the end, you need to recognize the significant differences between the generations - and pool them together to take advantage of the skills each generation brings to the table.

Inova has experienced rapid growth over the past few years. How do you keep your mission and values strong with so much change?

This is a real challenge. We prominently display our values on boards throughout the hospital, and our nursing team huddles together in front of the boards twice a day.

At Inova, we have what we call our "True North." This is our moral compass, focused on the well-being of each patient we are privileged to serve, as well as on quality, safety and affordability. Inova's CEO J. Knox Singleton has said that "Inova is committed to a future of health, not just healthcare." This vision becomes the touchstone by which we measure every aspect of our strategy. If something doesn't tie back to our "True North," it isn't put into action.