Soapbox:
Make Your Compassion Heard: Narrate Care and Service
By Wendy Leebov Ed.D., Partner; Language of Caring, LLC

I was going through my mother’s “Health” folder last week and I came across a long forgotten note I wrote to myself months ago when I had an “aha” experience while sitting at my mother’s bedside.

A nurse came in to perform a procedure on my mother and she brought a student nurse with her. As the nurse approached my mother and performed the procedure, she told the student nurse every single thing she was doing and why—in specific detail. “Here’s what I’m going to do. Here’s why Mrs. Leebov needs this done. Okay. My first step is to…. Okay, here I go. I’m watching closely to make sure all of the fluid flows in. I check on Mrs. Leebov’s comfort as I go. Okay, looks like all the fluid has been absorbed and I can now put a nice clean dressing on her arm…..” As she proceeded, this nurse talked out loud to the student nurse about what she was thinking, assessing, and decisions she was considering, and she described how what she was doing addressed my mother’s health issues and her concerns.

I was struck by this. First of all, she was addressing her comments to the student nurse, not to my mother or me. Second, I found her narration very informative; it gave me confidence that she knew what she was doing. She reduced the mystery around my mother’s care and this nurse’s intentions or actions. About an hour later, this same nurse returned to my mother’s room to do some additional things. This time, no student came with her. And this time, she proceeded to do things to my mother in silence, without narration or explanation.
My AHA Moment

If caregivers, admissions representatives, housekeepers, maintenance people and everyone else on the care team would narrate aloud what they’re doing for the patient and family, the patient and family would benefit greatly. They would:

- Know what is happening and why
- Know what to expect
- Feel less anxious
- Be more likely to engage and participate in their care
- Comment about what is happening
- Ask more and better questions
- Feel more secure that they are in good hands
- Experience and savor the patient-centeredness of the staff
- See how focused the staff member was on them; appreciate their concentration and mindfulness

Knowing the staff member’s intent at every step enables the patient and family to speak up when that intent is not being fulfilled. Also, a running narration creates conversation and connection between staff and patient. There are no long silences and the time feels to the patient like it’s going faster.

What I Wish Had Happened As I Sat with My Mother

The nurse narrates for my mother: “Mrs. Leebov, Ashley and I are working together today. Ashley is a nursing student. I’m going to be telling you what I’m doing and why as we proceed with your care, and I’ve invited Ashley to listen in. Please comment and ask questions any time. Okay? To begin, we are going to do a morning assessment. First, I’ll check your blood pressure. I’m going to be giving you two new medications that affect your blood pressure, and I want to know how your blood pressure is doing before starting any new meds.”

The nurse narrates for the student nurse: “Ashley, you’ll see that I’ll be talking all through my shift. The norm on our unit is to narrate our care to the patient and family, explaining every little thing we’re doing and why as we go along.”

Important Tips about Narrating Care

**Use simple language.** Let the patient and/or family member know what you are doing using terms they can understand, not medical jargon. “I’m putting this needle in your arm to hook you up to an IV drip. This bag contains a saline solution that will help you restore the fluid you need when we give you medication.”

**Explain every step as you perform it.** This is equally important whether you are entering data in the EHR, giving an injection, or taking a patient to another department for a test.

**Help people know what to expect.** “It may sting a bit as I put the needle in. Then you shouldn’t feel any pain from it.”

**Explain why.** Go beyond explaining what you’re doing. Explain also why you’re doing it and specifically the benefit for the patient. “I brought you an extra blanket, because I want you to stay warm and relaxed.”

**Make narrating care and service a norm.** Have everyone throughout your organization do it-- admissions representatives, receptionists, technicians, food services, nurses, physicians--everyone.
Narrate improvement too! If your organization makes great efforts and achieves impressive strides in improving care, but patients are unaware of them, your hard work may go unappreciated. Let’s say you launch a campaign to reduce wait times, and succeed in cutting in half the average wait of an hour. That’s great, but patients waiting might still be irritated, unless you let them know you are working to streamline and reduce waits. “Mrs. Hodge, you may need to wait about twenty minutes for the doctor to see you. I’d like you to know that we are doing all we can to reduce waits. In fact, in the last three months, we managed to shave down hour-long waits to a half hour on average. Your time is important to us and we appreciate your patience.”

Describe any symptoms or discomfort they should tell you about. “If it does bother you for more than a minute or you notice any swelling, please let me know.”

Ask the patient what they know about their situation. You’ll be better able to narrate meaningfully.

In Closing
Expressions of compassion only go so far in easing the anxiety of patients and their family members if they don’t understand what you are doing and why.

By narrating care, you keep patients and families informed. You reduce their anxiety and the feeling of powerlessness that too often accompanies medical experiences. You better engage them. You stay focused. And patients and families appreciate you for it.

How to be Mindful at the Doctor’s Office
Paralleling our message to healthcare professionals, this New York Times article encourages patients to practice mindfulness to improve communication and their experience with their physicians and nurses.

It Takes a Village: The Importance of the Compassionate Stranger
Patients in the hospital for a few days encounter an average of 50 healthcare professionals, so many that they may be considered “compassionate strangers”. In this essay in the newsletter of the Association for Patient Experience, Mary Beth Modic, DNP, RN, CNS, CDE, shares her favorite compassionate stranger story and gives tips to nurses on how to best express compassion for patients they encounter only briefly.

“I listen is to lean in softly with a willingness to be changed by what we hear.”

Mark Nepo, poet and philosopher

“Empathy isn’t just something that happens to us - a meteor shower of synapses firing across the brain - it’s also a choice we make: to pay attention, to extend ourselves.”

Leslie Jamison, author
The Empathy Exams: Essay
Narrating Daily Life
Discuss the importance of narrating care (see Soapbox). Acknowledge that providing a running narrative of what you’re doing might not be easy for some people, especially introverts.

Provide skill practice using daily life routines. Write various scenarios on pieces of paper such as:

- Getting my kids ready for school
- Making dinner
- Shopping for a bathing suit

Have people divide into pairs and act out one situation each, narrating every action and thought along the way.

Encourage humor by demonstrating with this example: Getting the kids ready for school: “First of all I’m setting up the coffee maker because without my coffee I’ll just fall back asleep. Now I’m gently shaking my teenage daughter and telling her it’s time to get up. Now I’m not so gently shaking my teenage daughter and telling her it’s time to get up. Now I’m back in the kitchen with my eight year-old. I’m pouring her a bowl of cereal with the last of the milk, because I forgot to buy more yesterday. Now I’m drinking my coffee with the leftover milk from her cereal…”

Afterward, ask people to identify one task they do at work and to commit to narrating it for the people involved.

Congratulations, Dr. Blanchard!
The Language of Caring team is delighted to announce that our Chief Medical Officer, Jeremy Blanchard, MD, MMM, CPXP has earned the credential of Certified Patient Experience Professional (CPXP) by the Patient Experience Institute (PXI), a subsidiary of The Beryl Institute. Dr. Blanchard is among the first physicians in the country to receive this certification. Dr. Blanchard has always been committed to building collaborative teams, ensuring compassionate patient care, and engaging physicians in quality care and innovation.

CPXP certification is an international designation intended for healthcare professionals with a commitment and interest in patient experience improvement. The certification exam followed a rigorous and standardized process. Said Jason A. Wolf, President, Patient Experience Institute, “The recipients of this certification represent a visionary, thoughtful and committed group of individuals focused on changing the landscape of healthcare for the better.”

Jimmy Kimmel Thanks Nurses and Physicians Who Saved His Infant Son
A few hours after the birth of a son to Jimmy Kimmel (host of the late-night talk show Jimmy Kimmel Live!) and his wife Molly, a nurse noticed the infant had a heart murmur and was purplish. Watch here as he tells the story, on his show, of the night when the newborn undergoes emergency surgery to correct a heart defect. His voice breaking with emotion, he thanks—by name—the nurses and physicians who saved his son’s life.
Let’s connect at these upcoming events!

Catholic Health Assembly Conference: Building Bridges by Faith
June 11 – 13, 2017, New Orleans, LA

- Visit our exhibit to chat with us and access great resources.
- To schedule a private meeting with us contact:
  ◊ Jill Golde, Partner & SVP, Market Development, at jgolde@languageofcaring.com or 314-571-9607
  ◊ Cheryl Glass, VP Business Development, at cglass@languageofcaring.com or 314-256-1415
  Click here to register for the conference.

Don’t Miss Our Program Administrators Huddle
June 30, 2pm EDT

For more information contact Autumn Bollinger, Client Services Manager and Coach, at: abollinger@languageofcaring.com.

We have ongoing support services for clients including Program Administrator Huddles, Nursing Leader and Physician Leader webinars. We also have Leadership Development SkillShops including Heart-Head-Heart™ Mastery, Reinforcement, Appreciation and Feedback, Skill Mastery for Leaders, Coaching to GREAT and Hardwiring Accountability.

For more information and to discuss how your team can access these services, please contact Dorothy Sisneros, Partner and SVP, Client Services, at: dsisneros@languageofcaring.com or

Kimberly Carson, Director Client Services and Coach, at: kcarson@languageofcaring.com
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  Make Your Compassion Heard: Narrate Care and Service
  

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