



From Cooperative Learning Strategies to Quality Continuing Care Workplaces

Interview with Sharla King, PhD, Director, Health Sciences Education and Research Commons, University of Alberta

Reflection: *“Learning needs to be embedded in the workplace, but it will only happen with dedicated space, time and commitment.”*

What Changed?

At eight pilot centres, team leaders were trained to become facilitators for Learning Circles, which brought practitioners together to identify and address practice priorities. The learning tasks chosen were site specific and ranged from questions such as how to implement a practice guideline to bigger picture challenges.

“One of the long-term care centres wanted to explore what patient centred care meant to them,” says Sharla King. It then expanded from the Learning Circle to the entire site. “That was powerful for them.” The result was a definition of patient-centred care constructed by staff and ultimately posted at the entrance to the facility. “That’s probably an exercise every site could go through,” she says.

How did seniors’ voices or experiences inform your project?

King’s own parents are aging and as she contemplated the possibility they may need home care at some point in the future, she realized the most important person in their lives might be the Health Care Aide (HCA) that supported them. “That’s an important job. That’s an important career.”

At the same time, as a university educator, she realized continuous quality improvement in patient care requires continuous learning, especially for HCA’s who provide most direct care. It’s easy to learn at a university where the priority is learning, she says. It’s much harder to continue learning in a workplace where the priority is appropriately patient care.

How did your thinking and/or that of your colleagues change?

The change was from expecting in-service training to be periodic and off site to exploring how learning can become integrated in an ongoing way at the point of care.

What do we need to ensure all seniors who need it can benefit from this change?

No one would dispute the belief that organizations need to incorporate continuous learning, says King, but we haven’t adequately addressed how to do that at the point of care. “You have



to make the time, make the space for it and value it as part of your priority focus on patient care." It will also require training team leaders to facilitate learning rather than to primarily disseminate information. The payoff is not just improved care, says King, but the project has shown Learning Circles also contribute to more collaborative, engaged teams.