As a culture, we have become obsessed with converting actions into numbers so that watching the numbers can become our only reality. Corporations listed on the New York Stock Exchange live or die by their quarterly numbers. In health care, we are confronted with public reporting of our quality data on Web sites and reimbursement that is tied to the quality numbers. Numbers get our attention. We try desperately to describe what we do into the common language of numbers so we can communicate succinctly where we stand and what we need to do. The tenure of nurse managers and chief nursing officers depends on their ability to manage the numbers. But in reality our job is not just about managing numbers. We, as leaders, are charged with guiding the organization and its people to a higher level of involvement and commitment to the goals of the organization by utilizing measurement appropriately. The only way we can get there is to make measurement a joyful participative adventure in our organization.

Bossidy and Charan (2002) note the problem of the conventional budget process has become meaningless to people in the organization because the process is disconnected from the reality of the organization. These authors discuss establishing a social software of execution in which the people of an organization are involved in setting realistic targets linked to the operating plan which is tied to their own reward system. These authors see three flaws with the traditional budgeting struggles: (a) lack of robust dialogue about the plan’s assumptions, (b) lack of action programs to achieve the targets, and (c) lack of opportunities for involvement of people in the totality of the organization and coaching opportunities.

The drive to convert financial and quality information to numbers will fail unless we can connect measurement to the larger purpose of the organization and people’s lives.

Information must be converted to knowledge.

As people in organizations use numbers as their servants rather than being slaves to numbers, everyone will succeed.
bers will fail unless we can connect measurement to the larger purpose of the organization and people’s lives. We can use numbers to control people, or we can use numbers to help people understand the larger picture and guide them and the organization along the path to success. Mintzberg (2004) introduces the concept “zest for business” as an important characteristic of the successful leader and notes that effective leadership engages and inspires. Leaders have an obligation to ensure that everyone in the organization can use measurement appropriately and turn measurement into knowledge for one’s personal use and for the organization’s. The “zest for business” and a passion for our mission can be enabled by using measurement in ways that inspire versus cripple an organization.

**Converting Information to Knowledge**

Information and numbers are not what we need. Knowledge is the intelligence of the organization that is created out of many sources of knowing. Information and numbers are just one source. We must convert information to knowledge. For example, an expert nurse will use information from a variety of sources, including electronically monitored physiological data to determine the best course of action. A new nurse will be “data bound” and respond just to the numbers because his experience limits his “knowing” from many sources. Unfortunately, in leadership positions, we too often look only at the numbers and fail to make the expert connections between the numbers and the knowledge. Davenport (2001) recommends that managers take the role of a bureaucracy buster to act as an intermediary between staff who are continually converting information into usable knowledge and the upper echelon of the organization who cannot see beyond the traditional models of utilizing information generated at a very high level. We all know that the higher in the organization, the less information and knowledge that person has about the operations of the organization and will be tempted to make decisions only from the vantage of the tip of the iceberg.

In successful organizations people are committed to higher levels of performance because they are committed to the higher purpose of the organization that feeds their mission. Measurement becomes a useful tool for everyone to use to examine specific functions.

**What’s the Answer?**

Co-missioning. Covey (2004) proposes that “The key to unleashing the power of the workforce is co-missioning” (p. 224), which he describes as clarifying the mission, vision, and values of the organization so they may overlap with the needs of the individual. When this happens, the natural outgrowth of examining the performance of the organization becomes clear and supported by all. Balancing mission with margin in a way that all understand and support is essential. When we “co-mission” a measurement system with our staff, the drive to understand the outcomes of our efforts becomes a natural rather than an unnatural force in the organization. People then are eager to have data that provide information to improve performance.

Feedback. We can all agree that we need more than numbers to work effectively. Wheatley (2005) makes the point that numbers and measurement should be a helpful servant for us, serving us well in the quality and understanding that we need. Wheatley (2005) differentiates between measurement and feedback and makes the point that feedback creates that continuous loop of adjusting and adapting that creates a higher form. For example, we can visualize the numbers that tell us we did or did not staff to the patient’s acuity as an absolute measure of success or failure. Or we can view these data in the context of other data from all over the organization that provide a continuous learning cycle for gathering feedback and self-adjust to the conclusions that knowledge brings us. Report cards that have punitive consequences soon kill the heart of the people and the heart of the organization. Report cards/dashboard that provide information that can be turned into knowledge to self-correct complex systems provide the structure that creates commitment and a zest for excellence.

**Measuring the right thing.** Wheatley (2005) also notes that “Far too many organizations have lost the path to quality because they have burdened themselves with unending measures” (p.158). Her message is that we need measures that inform us about our critical capacities such as teamwork and learning that will sustain us into the future. Mintzberg (2004) notes that management is not a science and that effective management happens when art, craft, and science meet. Measurement that reduces complex situations into simplistic measures that do not represent the world of the front-line person will fail.

Building for capacity vs. getting results. The classic story of the person who killed the goose that laid the golden eggs can be an outcome of the misuse of measurement. Wheatley (2005) cautions that we must make sure that our measurements are enabling us to build an enduring organization. What we measure shapes behavior. If our measures reward individualistic, secretive, aggressive behaviors that focus on individual people or departments, the organization will not sustain itself because the building blocks of teamwork and mission-driven work will soon die. Measures that are built around long-term values and goals can be sustained over time.

And who says measurement can’t be fun? Measurement in the form of an open self-correcting system of feedback that provides knowledge to enable growth and learning and enhances significance is a beautiful thing. All living organisms grow and learn by trial and error. A tree puts out a root and receives the feedback that the chosen path is blocked by a rock. But the root is not diverted from its mission of finding food and water for the tree, and diverts itself around the rock.
Summary

We measure to determine where we stand financially or in our quality outcomes. As people see the connection of measures and the success of the company, everything makes more sense. Izzo (2005) writes that profits/net margins are important to an organization and are like oxygen to a person. If we have oxygen, we can focus on the important things in life; if we don’t we are preoccupied with gasping for air. Organizations are the same way. With the oxygen of profits, organizations can focus on those things that matter most to the staff and the customer. But when the search for profits becomes obsessive because of greed for excess profits or impending financial doom, everybody loses. Izzo (2005) reminds us that organizations shouldn’t exist for only profit, just as people don’t exist for only oxygen. Oxygen is merely an enabler for us to do the work of living.

Measurement and numbers are the oxygen needed to achieve excellence. As people in organizations use numbers as their servants rather than being slaves to numbers, everyone will succeed. If the use of measurement is seen as punitive, and not a system of serving people to attain that zest for business and a higher mission, we will not achieve the level of excellence our people, patients, and communities deserve.

REFERENCES

Advanced Practice
Special Interest Group Update

The Advanced Practice SIG Committee has gotten off to a running start. The committee has chosen to conduct our group a little differently this year. We have implemented five sub-committees with committee leaders. Our subcommittees are as follows: Legislative, Publications, Web Site, Conference Planning, and Mentoring Program. Subcommittee leaders will assist with mentoring other interested group members and volunteers into their present roles. The subcommittee leaders are as follows:

- Legislative: Darene Hall and Fran Fournier
- Publications: Sara Otterness
- Web Site Monitoring: Nancy Pelfrey
- Conference Planning: Fran Fournier and Darene Hall
- Mentoring Program: Peggy Nusser-Gerlach and Mary Schira

Deborah Brooks and Mary Rose Kott are the other committee members. We had started out this year with nine committee members, and presently we have seven.

After reviewing the 2005 National Symposium networking session evaluation survey, we will continue with the case study presentation format for 2006.

Sara Otterness has done a wonderful job with organizing upcoming articles for the Nephrology Nursing Journal this year. Please make sure you obtain your copy.

The Renal Physicians Association is co-sponsoring a seminar this fall with ANNA and AANPA for nurse practitioners and physician assistants entitled “Collaborative Approaches to Excellent Nephrology Practice: A Team Approach to Optimal Kidney Care” This seminar will be held September 26-27, 2005, in Kansas City following ANNA’s Fall Meeting. Most of the committee members of this SIG will be attending.

The SIG’s mentoring program continues to grow and remains in an ongoing developing phase. This program pairs experienced advanced practice nurses (APNs) with newer APNs based on areas of practice.

Please continue to use the Advanced Practice Forum on the ANNA Web site for questions and concerns about practice issues. Nancy will be monitoring the site frequently.

This is going to be a very exciting time for APNs everywhere. Watch the ANNA Web site and ANNA E-News for upcoming changes. If you have any issue or concerns about APN practice, you can reach me at darenehall@socal.rr.com.

Darene Hall
Advanced Practice SIG Leader
Chumash Chapter
darenehall@socal.rr.com