



A Nurse's Guide to Intergenerational Diversity



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Published by
The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions
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First Edition, June 2011

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Farquharson Fry, Barbara
A nurse's guide to intergenerational diversity / Barb Fry.

(Thriving in the workplace)
Issued also in French under title: Guide sur la diversité
intergénérationnelle à l'intention du personnel infirmier.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-0-9868382-1-7

1. Nurses--Employment--Canada. 2. Intergenerational
relations--Canada. I. Canadian Federation of Nurses
Unions II. Title. III. Series: Thriving in the workplace

RT86.75.C3F37 2011 610.7306'990971 C2011-902987-1



Printed and bound in Canada by
Imprimerie Plantagenet Printing



Acknowledgements

The National Executive Board of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions would like to acknowledge the dedication, hard work and enthusiasm of Barbara Fry in developing these much needed tools to assist nurses in addressing the issues presented by intergenerational workplaces.

We would also like to thank Arlene Wortsman and Amanda Crupi who authored the research on which these guides are based. Their research is summarized in the report *From Textbooks to Texting: Addressing issues of intergenerational diversity in the nursing workplace*.

Our sincere gratitude goes to the many nurses and nursing students who took part in shaping our understanding of intergenerational diversity in the nursing workplace and to all of you who will be an intergenerational STAR, using these and other tools to help yourself and others thrive in the intergenerational workplace.



Visit the CFNU website ***Thriving in an Intergenerational Workplace*** at:

thinknursing!ca
Towards a Better Workplace



When we understand the characteristics, values and motivations of other generations, there is a greater appreciation for what everyone brings to the workplace. We hope that this website will help you reflect on your own situation and offer you resources to help take advantage of the benefits of a multigenerational workplace.

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Message from the President



The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions represents over 176,000 nurses and nursing students in nine provinces. We have a diverse membership.

CFNU takes pride in listening to our members from across Canada and shaping our work to meet their needs.

We heard from many of our nurses that the dynamics of four generations of nurses working side by side sometimes results in additional challenges within already stressed workplaces. We decided it was time for change: time to put an end to the imagery of nurses “eating their young”; time to put an end to nursing being known as the “sickest profession” with over 69,200 nurses absent from work each week, working over 313,000 hours a week of overtime; time to embark on a journey to further investigate this issue within our membership and to help nurses thrive in their workplace.

This journey started in 2007 with focus groups and surveys of our membership across the country. We published our findings in the report *From Textbooks to Texting: Addressing issues of intergenerational diversity in the nursing workplace*.

We asked you, our members, what was needed to start addressing these issues, and this is what you told us:

- Better communication among the generations
- Help for nurses and managers to better understand their collective agreements
- Greater collaboration
- Reinforcement of respect in the workplace to improve quality of worklife

That brought us to the next step in our journey. We worked with Barb Fry, a renowned nurse educator, to develop

material that will get people thinking and talking about the challenges and benefits of working in a diverse environment.

We know it takes a team effort to improve the workplace, so this guide calls on everyone to examine the part they play in creating a healthy workplace. That team includes front-line nurses, educators, managers, senior administrators and everyone in between. I think you will find the approach inclusive, introspective and challenging — and I don't know a single nurse who backs away from a challenge!

We must value individuality but know that we have common goals that bind us — like caring for patients. These goals oblige us to look beyond just diversity in age to acknowledge and respect other forms of diversity such as race, culture, religion, physical ability, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexual orientation.

Regardless of your generation, this guide offers something for everyone. We hope it stimulates your thinking about diversity in your workplace. There is always something we can learn about and from each other. This is the concept of “co-mentoring.” We have also created a website dedicated to thriving in an intergenerational workplace. Visit www.thinknursing.ca and take a quiz to test your intergenerational savvy and skim our list of resources to help you and your team explore ways to improve workplace relationships.

I hope you enjoy this guide, workbook and website and join with us to ensure that all nurses are “thriving in the workplace.”

In solidarity always,
Linda Silas

Foreword by Dr. Josephine Etowa



Nurses of today are confronted with the reality of working in diverse environments, and as the largest profession in the health care workforce, they need to take the lead in embracing the opportunities and challenges associated with this reality. This book is a guide for nurses to understand and respond appropriately to intergenerational diversity in their workplace.

This guide is an important step towards more comprehensive future work in the field of diversity in Canadian nursing. The primary focus of this guide is intergenerational diversity, but it is important to acknowledge the significance of other forms of diversity and their roles in the workplace.

Diversity broadly refers to a wide range of differences, including but not limited to: gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability or condition, sexual orientation/identity, religion, nationality, even personality. In the context of the workplace, diversity refers to the heterogeneity of the people in an organization or system. Valuing diversity in the workplace means respecting differences and recognizing the unique contributions of individuals.

Many of the ideas presented in this guide are relevant and applicable to addressing issues of diversity in general. For example, the guide identifies common needs and expectations for the workplace and implores nurses to “care for each other as well as we care for patients.” These concepts and other problem-solving strategies presented can be easily applied to work with all kinds of diversity, including ethno-cultural.

Ethno-cultural diversity and cultural competence have been studied for many years along with the benefits and challenges that workplace diversity brings. Part of my own work in the past decade has examined this issue in the

Canadian context. Diversity is important to today's health care environment, especially considering the extent of globalization and increasing multiculturalism of western societies like Canada.

People from different backgrounds often have different experiences and unique perspectives on solving problems and interacting with patients and co-workers. Fresh perspectives and ideas can help health care organizations become more attractive to the diverse Canadian population they serve. It can also help them grow and expand in exciting new directions. However, problems inevitably arise in workplaces when targeted efforts are not made to embrace and address diversity. These challenges include ineffective communication and resistance to change — often leading to confusion, lack of team work and low morale. Frustration often occurs when people with diverse backgrounds interact with limited understanding of each other's world views, resulting in feelings of being under-valued and misunderstood. This problem is not limited to collegial interactions but can also arise in patient interactions.

Well-managed workplace diversity leads to better communication, increased adaptability and increased productivity. We aim to create environments where nurses from diverse backgrounds enjoy their work, are creative, take risks, and feel inspired to help to maximize leadership potential.

Today, and into the future, successful health care organizations will be those who embrace all kinds of diversity and the strength it brings to our work. When they invest in resources to foster positive work environments, they will reap the benefits. This guide is one of these resources and I recommend it to everyone who has a role within the nursing workforce.

Introduction

In 2008, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions undertook research to investigate the impact of the multigenerational workplace on the quality of worklife for its members. Its primary objectives were to:

1. understand the impact of generational diversity on workplace behavior, career expectations, and the interpersonal climate in the nursing workplace, and
2. identify ways in which intergenerational diversity impacts collective bargaining.

The research findings based on a review of the literature, consultations with experts in the field, focus groups and a web-based survey are well documented in CFNU's publication *From Textbooks to Texting: Addressing issues of intergenerational diversity in the nursing workplace*. The findings revealed that there are at least four generations currently operating in most workplaces, and each generation's characteristics are shaped by world events, and societal and contextual circumstances, perceptions, and experiences (see Part II for more detail on each generation).

The data revealed that, because of the diversity among the generations,

a number of issues have developed in the workplace, giving rise to complex relationships, conflict, and numerous challenges for staff, employers and organizations. Some of the key issues identified are related to work hours and conditions, work-life balance and well-being, and the workplace culture.

In addressing the issues for bargaining, five major needs emerged:

1. professional development,
2. funding for continuing education,
3. flexible scheduling,
4. creative/flexible benefits, and
5. innovation in practice.

The study offered a number of strategies and solutions for further consideration:

- Supporting professional development and continuing education
- Providing opportunities for self-scheduling of shifts and vacations
- Providing opportunities for individualized benefit plans
- Establishing mentorship programs that support both protégés and mentors
- Supporting innovative practices
- Establishing mentorship programs within the union

- Providing longer union orientation for nurses
- Holding workshops to sensitize nurses to the needs of each generation

The study also proposed joint approaches for the union and employer to:

- Improve communication between the generations
- Help managers better understand the collective agreement
- Encourage collaboration with educators to improve intergenerational communication
- Reinforce the requirement for respect in the workplace to improve quality of worklife

Unions and the Intergenerational Workplace

Rather than viewing today's current generational realities as potential crises, this research speaks of opportunities for the future. Within these opportunities lie possibilities to create a new way of being that inspires collaboration, learning, growth, and change among the diverse generations of nurses. CFNU's research identifies the issues that frame intergenerational relationships in many of today's health care environments and

offers powerful directions for resolving some of the challenges that face both unions and employers.

By addressing intergenerational diversity, unions can both lead and collaborate with employers to create organizations where people want to work, where they are treated with dignity and respect, and at the end of the day remind nurses that they make a difference in the lives of others.

This initiative builds on CFNU's research by helping individual nurses, staff groups, and leaders to reflect, act upon, and move toward resolving some of the challenges posed by intergenerational diversity in the workplace. It will offer points to ponder and strategies to consider. Hopefully it will inspire in each of you the courage to change and to create a new way of being that can lead to intergenerational harmony.

Peter Drucker, a management consultant and writer, once said: "The best way to predict the future is to create it!" What kind of workplace future do unions want? What are unions doing to create real changes in quality of worklife in a multigenerational environment? Read on to find this out and to discover ways to join them.

Did you know?



Gen X nurses were most severely affected by the health care reform of the 1990s in Canada. These nurses were just entering the labour market at a time of hospital restructuring and large-scale layoffs, making it difficult or impossible to find full-time work. Many nurses moved to the US for work or left the profession entirely.

Got Gap? Challenges of the Intergenerational Workplace

Chapter 1

Relationships Matter

Maintaining healthy workplace relationships within the nursing peer group is fundamental to professional practice and a huge challenge for nurses in today's world of work. The demands imposed by rapid change, technology, rising acuity levels, aging populations and "doing more with less" are creating enormous strains on quality of worklife and how nurses work together. Toss four generations with growing ethno-cultural diversity, differing expectations, perceptions and experiences into the workplace mix and you have conditions ripe for a generational "perfect storm."

To further complicate things, there is a realization that the old ways of working are no longer effective. Given these current conditions, how do nurses learn to work together to create a new way of being? How can they create new ways to relate to one another so that they can provide the best possible care for patients and clients and improve their quality of worklife?

The Beginning of the End?

Our health care culture is multi-faceted, and we are both proud of and can be victimized by our workplace relationships. When things go wrong, energy is usually directed toward finding someone or something to blame. Yet it is rarely that simple. When it comes to unhealthy and unsupportive workplace relationships as evidenced in generational conflict, it is usually due to a combination of individual or group actions in a system that is overwhelmed, and under leadership that tolerates these conditions. The good

news is that such tension and conflict are preventable.

When individuals, unions, and employers work together to promote healthy workplace relationships and quality of worklife, they create environments where people want to work because:

- Individuals feel supported by their union
- Leadership is authentic and trustworthy
- There is absolute belief and evidence that the organization's most precious resources are its people and they are treated accordingly
- All the people in the organization live its mission, vision, and values
- The primary focus is on providing quality care to people and a quality worklife for staff
- "The finger of blame" does not point at anyone
- Professionalism is a way of being

Nurses' Workplace Relationships: caring for each other as well as we care for patients

Relationship problems that arise among the generations are often played out negatively in the workplace and are inconsistent with the caring nature of nurses' work. Nurses depend on each other and are obligated to care for one another according to the *Codes of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice* governing their own practice in order to provide optimum levels of nursing care to our patients, residents and clients. There is an expectation that nurses will assume professional attitudes and behavior in the workplace. When nurses fail to support each other, when they communicate disrespectfully, taunt, criticize or make fun of a colleague, they violate the ethical, moral and legal foundations of professional nursing practice.

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions believes that all employees are entitled to work in an environment where everyone is treated equally and which is free from harassment. Everyone should be treated with respect and dignity.

This basic tenet applies to all nurses regardless of their professional roles whether they are staff nurses, managers, union leaders, union members or senior organizational leaders. When nurses hurt one another, they compromise their efforts to adapt to a workplace fraught with demands.

Good Nurses Behaving Badly: Why can't everyone just get along?

Much has been written over the last several years about the multigenerational workplace, the demographics of each generational cohort, their differences, what motivates them, and what needs to change in order to keep everyone happy. There is also the assumption in the literature that if we learn everything we can about each generation, structure processes to meet their needs, and have managers facilitate healthier workplace relationships, the problems will go away. Intergenerational tensions develop for a number of reasons and are symptoms of deeper workplace issues. Adversarial, disrespectful relationships, command and control leadership styles, generation bashing, bullying and chronic negativity are but a few of the negative intergenerational behaviors that wreak

havoc on quality of care, the health and well-being of dedicated staff and their managers, and the work of health care organizations. Dealing with these behaviors is difficult for individuals, managers and teams. Even more difficult to resolve are the conditions that give rise to these behaviors in the first place.

Negative intergenerational relationships develop...

...when senior leaders:

- Do not include in their strategic planning initiatives that inspire and require healthy workplace environments
- Do not “walk the talk”
- Do not demonstrate values-driven behavior
- Fail to have conversations about leadership, trust-building behavior and authenticity
- Allow human resources policies and practices to remain rigid, unchanging, and reflect a “one size fits all” mindset
- Fail to recognize the differences among the generations and neglect to develop practices and protocols to meet their needs

...when managers:

- Fail to inform new nurses of their collective agreement rights
- Turn a blind eye to negative behavior and become reluctant to hold people accountable for their behavior
- Are unavailable and staff “never see them”
- Lack the skill to manage unprofessional behavior
- Feel powerless and disrespected
- Want to be friends with some of the staff
- Fail to communicate their expectations clearly
- Fail to role model values-driven behavior based on respect, integrity and accountability
- Do not see coaching and mentoring as integral to improving quality of worklife
- Do not create opportunities for conversations at staff meetings about the “softer” issues such as relationship improvement and understanding the generations
- Do not reflect on their own leadership style and make changes as needed
- Are not tuned into the negative power dynamics that may dominate their practice setting

- Do not equitably distribute professional development opportunities
- Do not reinforce applicable *Standards of Practice*
- Do not demonstrate work-life balance
- Fear “the unions” instead of working with them

...when individual nurses and health care workers:

- Become frustrated when things get in the way of “just wanting to take care of patients”
- Are bullied by managers or colleagues
- Feel no one is listening or “no one understands” them
- Adopt an “It’s all about me” attitude and forget why they are there
- Fail to use the *Standards of Practice* in their daily practice
- Feel powerless and disrespected
- Lack knowledge of interpersonal dynamics and understanding about what makes each generation tick
- Choose bad manners and incivility with their peers
- Feel unsupported or uncertain about how to handle negative workplace relationships

- Fear “rocking the boat,” causing problems, or making a career-limiting move
- Fear holding a colleague, manager, or someone with more power, experience or seniority to a standard of professional accountability
- Live by the mantra “seniority rules”
- Fail to understand the power of collaboration
- Avoid difficult conversations about the underbelly (negative aspects) of professional nursing practice, quality of worklife, and what can be done to improve conditions of work

The Intergenerational Imperative

Drawing on the nursing literature, it has been said that even though nurses have a tremendous capacity to tolerate any number of challenges that accompany complex and changing workplaces, when they feel unsupported, disrespected or undervalued they will consider leaving the workplace and/or the profession. In an era when every nurse counts and staff shortages are commonplace, we cannot afford for nurses to leave workplaces because of negative workplace relationships. The Canadian Nurses

Association is predicting a shortfall of 60,000 full-time equivalent nurses by 2022. It is thought that for every nurse under the age of 35, there are two over the age of 50 and, on average, nurses retire around age 56, compared to the overall Canadian workforce at age 62.

Closing the Generational Gap

Harmony in intergenerational workplace relationships is possible when nurses are knowledgeable and supported (from the front line to senior leaders) to act in accordance with their professional *Standards of Practice* and *Code of Ethics*, seek to learn about and understand their colleagues, and choose, either individually or collectively, to do their part to create a place where people want to work. While recognizing that underlying conditions play an important role in creating positive workplaces, the power of individual nurses and nursing peer or staff groups to collaborate and influence positive change is immeasurable.

Did you know?



Baby Boomers are also known as the “sandwich generation.” This refers to Boomers who are often “sandwiched” between caring for their aging parents while still supporting their own (sometimes adult) children. The term is so popular that it has been officially added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

Learning About the Generations: Who, Where, What and Why?

Why should unions, nurses and employers bother trying to understand the generations?

When we seek to understand and support our colleagues:

- We increase union power and solidarity
- We build member participation in our unions
- Patients benefit from improved quality of care
- Other multi-disciplinary team members perceive us as cohesively working professionals rather than “eating our young”
- We are complying with the requirements of our *Standards of Practice* and *Code of Ethics*
- Conversations become collegial, respectful and growth-producing
- We feel respected and professionally empowered
- Communication becomes more open
- People want to work with us
- Retention and recruitment is improved
- Job satisfaction increases
- We experience a sense of belonging and purpose

The Workplace Generational Cocktail

The following is a thumbnail sketch of each of the generations, included simply to entice you to learn more. There are numerous excellent articles and reports (see the recommended readings list), as well as opportunities to increase your knowledge about your colleagues. You can then reflect on intergenerational dynamics in your workplace and quite possibly be inspired to take action to strengthen

Chapter 2

the quality of those vital professional relationships.

Words of Wisdom... and of Warning

Is it possible to paint a portrait of an entire generation? Each generation has a million faces and a million voices. What the voices say is not necessarily what the generation believes, and what it believes is not necessarily what it will act on. Its motives and desires are often hidden. It is a medley of good and evil, promise and threat, hope and despair. Like a straggling army, it has no clear beginning or end. And yet each generation has some features that are more significant than others; each has a quality as distinctive as a man's accent, each makes a statement to the future, each leaves behind a picture of itself.

"The Younger Generation." (1951). *TIME Magazine*. Vol. LVIII No. 19

The above quote comes from a 1951 article in *TIME Magazine*. It rightfully and critically questions tendencies towards stereotyping while highlighting the undeniable fact that there appear to be some unique qualities and

characteristics that each generation brings. These qualities are often shaped by a combination of world events and circumstances that had an impact on peoples' lives. We must recognize that, whenever broad characteristics are applied to an entire generation, they are simply generalizations. Not every one of a particular generation will have had the same experiences and formative influences. Ethno-cultural diversity means that many of the people we work with may have come from areas where the generations had other influences than those described here. The most important thing to remember is that we must learn about and appreciate individuals — as individuals.

With that in mind:

The Fascinating Mix of Four Generations

The following represents the most widely agreed upon generational groups in today's workplaces. There are others that are cropping up as each decade passes, and sadly some will decline as the years go on. Many Boomers will retire just a few years from now. The actual years into

which the generations fit will vary in the literature, and there are some individuals that can straddle two generations, possessing some qualities attributed to two generations. They are lovingly referred to as “cuspers.”

The following descriptions capture the four main cohorts found in the workplace today:

The Veterans, a.k.a. Traditionalists, a.k.a. Silent Generation (born between 1925 and 1944)

The Baby Boomers, a.k.a. Sandwich Generation (born between 1945 and 1964)

Generation X, a.k.a. Nexers (born between 1965 and 1980)

Generation Y, a.k.a. Millennials (born between 1981 and 2000)

THE VETERANS

Important influences:

- The World Wars and the Great Depression

What they are good at:

- Working in command and control environments, following the rules and meeting deadlines
- Knowing policies and procedures
- Possessing a sense of history from an organizational perspective
- Being conscious of resources
- Knowing the meaning of sacrifice
- Valuing tradition

Why we should love them:

- There are not many left in today's workplaces and when they leave, so will their experiences
- They work very hard
- They are loyal to the organization
- They work well with Gen X
- They are human beings worthy of being treated with dignity and respect

What may be frustrating:

- They are inclined not to say much
- They may not be able to physically manage the full demands of care due to their own challenges associated with normal aging
- At times, they may be inclined toward black-and-white thinking
- They may have a tendency to sometimes talk about “the way things used to be”

What they need:

- Clarity on underlying rationale, processes and decisions related to actions
- Opportunities to be heard, and to feel valued and treated with dignity and respect

THE BABY BOOMERS

They are presently the largest generational cohort.

Important influences:

- Hold onto your hats... “sex, drugs, and rock’n’roll!” Hard to believe, isn’t it? Anyone remember Woodstock? If you do, then “they” say you weren’t there!
- The Vietnam War, protest marches and Watergate
- The assassination of John F. Kennedy
- “Trudeaumania”
- The rise of Québec nationalism, the October Crisis and the 1980 referendum
- The move to metric from imperial measurement
- Space exploration
- The Cold War
- Turbulent economic times beginning with seemingly endless growth and followed by massive downsizing
- Being part of the “sandwich generation” caught between their adult children who cannot afford to move out (or their “boomerangs” who move out and come back

home... often with their children)
and caring for their aging parents
who are now living longer

What they are good at:

- Storytelling
- Protesting and marching for causes
- Identifying with their jobs and valuing loyalty
- Valuing and following policies and procedures
- Bringing experience to the table

Why we should love them:

- They are fun people
- They have invaluable experience and stories to tell
- They produced generations X and Y
- They possess a healthy skepticism
- They are human beings worthy of being treated with dignity and respect

What may be frustrating:

- Their tendency to view younger generations as having less loyalty and preparation for clinical practice

- They may be resistant to change
- Hearing them say, “Been there; done that; bought the t-shirt!”
- They want work-life balance but don’t know how to practice it
- A tendency to “love the patients, hate the paperwork”

What they need:

- To be left alone: over the past three decades they have been downsized, right-sized, bent, folded, twisted and mutilated by rapid and relentless organizational and health care change
- Clarity, honesty and sincerity
- To be recognized for the important mentorship they provide to younger nurses
- Fair pay, age-appropriate benefits and, ultimately, their pensions
- Opportunities for professional development
- To work in organizations with people who are trustworthy
- Education around technology and trust that “no question is a stupid question”
- To feel valued and treated with dignity and respect

- Flexibility to manage the demands of their personal lives

GENERATION X

Important influences:

- The energy crisis
- The Oka crisis
- *Meech Lake Accord, Charlottetown Accord* and referendum, The 1995 referendum on Québec independence
- The death of Princess Diana
- Changes in traditional family structures
- Without parents at home due to work demands, they were the first “latch key kids”
- Introduction of computerization and technological change
- Seeing their parents downsized during turbulent economic change
- Better/more accessibility to education
- Cuts to health care in the 1990s

What they are good at:

- Critical and independent thought and confidence
- Being resourceful

- Technology
- Projects
- Setting goals and meeting them
- Being leaders

Why we should love them:

- They love a challenge and they get things done
- They regard work as a means of achieving life goals
- They are technologically savvy
- They show initiative when others may sit back
- They are great advocates for organizational changes that enhance work-life balance
- They are the next generation of leaders
- They are human beings worthy of being treated with dignity and respect

What may be frustrating:

- They will not stay in a workplace if their goals are not met and if they feel unsupported
- They are very independent and self-directed
- Some may use threats of leaving as a means of getting what they want
- They may not need as much guidance as others think they do

- Their expressions of confidence
- Reluctance to sacrifice personal time for the sake of work

What they need:

- Authentic leadership and honesty
- Adequate compensation and appropriate benefits
- Flexible work hours
- Tangible recognition for accomplishments
- Work-life balance and healthy workplace relationships
- To see the union as a support network for helping them achieve their goals
- Regular feedback
- To feel valued and be treated with dignity and respect

GENERATION Y

Important influences:

- 9/11 attacks
- The 2004 tsunami in Asia
- Obama elected U.S. president
- Climate change (global warming)
- Explosion of technology in the form of games, gadgets and free music

- A cultural shift focused on child-rearing practices that included lots of praise and rewards in order to preserve high self-esteem
- Multimedia bombardment resulting in direct and instant connection to world events

What they are good at:

- Being knowledgeable of global issues and awareness of the responsibilities of being a global citizen
- “Going green” and preserving the environment
- Maintaining enthusiasm in the workplace
- Using technology for instant access to current and accurate information
- Being ready to move on to the next workplace experience
- Being great team players
- Prioritizing work-life balance
- Having little fear of authority
- Possessing a can-do attitude and self-confidence

Why we should love them:

- They are fun
- They care about the environment
- They are good team players
- They have excellent critical thinking skills and challenge conventional thought
- They are hard workers if they enjoy the work and people are kind
- They are human beings worthy of being treated with dignity and respect

What may be frustrating:

- They want to do things the way they learned how
- They do not respond well to command and control leadership styles
- Their need to see their boss as a “friend”
- They rely on text messaging and the Internet to get information (inclined not to read bulletin boards or practice manuals)

What they need:

- To be coached and mentored
- To be challenged

- Honesty
- To feel valued and treated with dignity and respect
- To have fun at work

Bottom Line

What everyone needs regardless of their generation

Although there are numerous differences within and among the generations, there are many characteristics, values and beliefs that nurses share. Whatever the similarities and differences, nurses are encouraged to reflect upon the principles related to caring, that many of us learned long ago in our basic nursing education (adapted from the American Psychiatric Nurses Association):

- Every individual is worthy of being treated with dignity and respect
- Behavior that is expected is often displayed
- Most people are capable of change

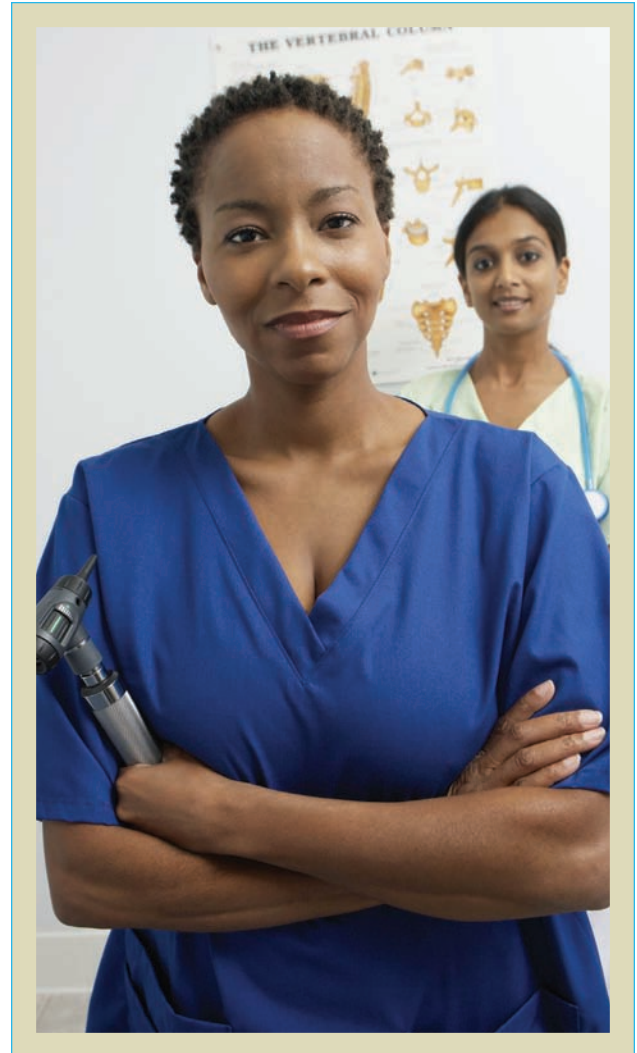
It is easy to focus on what is different about each generation, but when we focus on what we have in common, great things happen. Better still: when we focus on *both* our differences and our similarities,

greater things can happen, including having a more fair and more inclusive workplace.

The Bottom Line Beneath The Bottom Line

Common needs and expectations for the workplace

- To be treated with fairness, dignity and respect
- To be heard
- To have an honorable and authentic boss
- To have opportunities for new learning and professional development
- To be recognized for accomplishments
- To be shown appreciation and told “Thank you!”
- To be understood
- To be asked for an opinion and to receive constructive feedback
- To know that being there makes a difference
- To have (appropriate) fun and to laugh



The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they allow disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants...

Socrates

Transforming the Intergenerational Workplace

A Shared Reality: Future relationship challenges for all generations of nurses

The quote on the previous page is a perfect example of a shared perception that appears to have been passed down throughout the generations. Regardless of the challenges we currently face in this “generational soup” that many of us find ourselves in, there are many more ingredients to be added to the workplace relationship recipe, including aspects of diversity such as ethnicity, culture and gender. With these additions come opportunities to improve the flavor or totally destroy the mix. Success depends on the addition of a secret ingredient known as attitude! It’s an attitude that says, “We’ve never been here before in the history of work, so we will have to work together to figure things out and do what it takes to get the job done in a way that supports a healthy and quality worklife.”

Common Challenges

Issues of the past are now starting to be named and some steps are being taken toward their resolution. Unions have a challenge to take initiative and move this agenda forward. Examples of positive steps include (but are not limited to):

Chapter 3

1. Saying “yes” to conversations with one another that are aimed at adapting to rapidly changing workplaces and grounded in professionalism, mutual respect and trust
2. Giving up top-down and power-over attitudes in favor of collaboration, transparent decision-making, flexibility and authenticity
3. Embracing new competencies that include flexibility, innovation, creativity and risk-taking, and require bidding farewell to the rationale “because that’s the way we always do it around here”
4. Welcoming new ways of being, new rules, and new roles that enable collaboration. This means choosing between putting our energies into maintaining adversarial relationships or working together to improve quality of worklife and to advance quality care
5. Ensuring development opportunities for members are available and equitably distributed
6. Promoting, maintaining and ensuring that “healthy workplaces” are more than nice words on paper and that we create workplace cultures that support and inspire all nurses

Becoming an Intergenerational STAR: Everyone has a role to play

Each nurse, regardless of his or her formal position, has a role to play in transforming workplace relationships to reflect intergenerational harmony and respect for all kinds of diversity. Within each role there are opportunities to change and improve the way we relate to one another. The opportunities are countless, from modeling respectful behavior to taking collective action to improve quality of worklife. Nurses are not exempt from being accountable for their own behavior or dealing with actions from others that hurt nurses or their patients or clients.

This next section will help nurses explore ways in which everyone can champion much needed change in workplaces where there is imbalance or negativity in intergenerational relationships.

Are you a **Champion for Change**? If you recognize yourself in this list — you can be!

Staff nurses, clinical leaders, nurse managers and health service managers, senior nurse leaders, nurse educators/instructors, clinical nurse specialists, shop stewards and union representatives, executive leadership teams, and any others who have the initials RN, LPN or RPN after their names and a license to practice.

STAR Qualities and Principles: Change starts with you!

In life we can always choose to act or to do nothing, but a wise person once said: “If you keep doing what you’ve always done, you’ll keep getting what you always got!” Instead, I’d like to challenge you to strive for change by adopting the STAR qualities listed here. No one is perfect, but striving for improvement alone will positively impact your life and the lives of those around you too.

Be a Generational STAR



Be a **S**TEWARD of caring: for yourself, your colleagues and workplace relationships. Lead by example in bridging the generation gap.



Be a **T**EACHER but also a learner. Each generation has much to teach and learn. Education has the potential to help individuals change.



Be **A**CCOUNTABLE for all your actions. Professional accountability is never optional.



Give and require **R**ESPECT. Respect plays an important role in how others treat you, how you treat others and even how you treat yourself.

“We must be the change we wish to see in the world.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Did you know?



Veterans are also known as the “silent generation.”

The term was coined in a 1951 *TIME Magazine* story and referred to the generation coming of age at the time. They were not known to be activists — possibly influenced by US McCarthyism, a political era when it was at times unsafe to openly express opinion and beliefs.

Chapter 4

Self-Checks

It's important every so often to take stock of ourselves, or to conduct a self-check. It's good to ask: "What are my attitudes, knowledge and behavior around intergenerational issues in the workplace? How can I bridge or mend any relationship gaps that exist?" Below are some questions to get your self-exploration started. These broad questions can be easily applied to each and every member of the team:

1. What can I do/what role can I play to support creating healthy intergenerational relationships in our organization?
2. How can I work with others to facilitate positive interactions among team members?
3. Do I examine the collective agreement and bargaining from an intergenerational perspective?
4. How well do I know the collective agreement?
5. Do I look at incidents in the workplace from an intergenerational perspective?
6. When I see conflict, disrespectful or unprofessional behavior among nurses, what do I do about it? What conversations do I have?
7. Do I have a positive attitude so I can be part of the solution when it comes to intergenerational issues?
8. Do I contribute to a meeting agenda that will inspire conversations?
9. What opportunities are available for me to coach or mentor someone?
10. How can I promote and support the union's direction and role in addressing intergenerational issues?
11. What can I do to inspire respect in the workplace?
12. How do I reinforce positive workplace relationships?
13. Am I accountable for my actions?

14. Do I attend staff meetings and raise issues that are about situations and not people?
15. How well am I modeling work-life balance?
16. What can I do to inspire respect?
17. How can I work with others to facilitate positive interactions and communication among team members?
18. What are the impacts of intergenerational issues in my workplace?
19. How can these issues impact on the quality of care provided to patients?
20. How comfortable am I with tension and conflict? How well do I handle it?

Depending on your role within the organization, there may be additional, more unique questions that you might also ask yourself. Review the selection below and find the checklist that's right for you.

UNION REPRESENTATIVES/ STEWARDS & LEADERS

1. How do I inspire or influence others to maintain our collective agreement in a way that supports professional relationships for the sake of patient, client, resident care — and nurses?
2. Am I clear about my role in managing intergenerational issues?

3. Do I know about the impacts of intergenerational issues on the quality of worklife and quality of care?
4. Do I suggest forums and feedback sessions about how things are going within our intergenerational staff?
5. Do I contribute to union meetings in a way that will inspire conversations?
6. What opportunities are available for me to coach or mentor someone?
7. What can I do to influence my union to help improve intergenerational relationships?
8. How can I promote and support the union's direction in addressing intergenerational issues?
9. Does my steward team reflect the generations of the workplace?
10. Do I bring collective agreement issues of interest to specific age cohorts (e.g. pensions, maternity benefits, child care, casual work) to the attention of members?

STAFF NURSES

1. Am I practicing according to my *Standards of Practice* and *Code of Ethics*?
2. When confronted in an adversarial way, do I address the fact that this behavior is affecting our professional relationship or do I go away and hope that it will get better?

3. Are other nurses disrespectful, teasing, or bullying me? How does this affect my work?
4. Do intergenerational issues in my workplace manifest themselves in a way that negatively impacts patient care?
5. Do I attend staff meetings and raise issues that are about situations and not people?
6. Do I suggest forums and feedback sessions about how things are going within our team?
7. How frequently do I provide positive feedback to my colleagues, my manager, nurse educator, shop steward and others?
8. How well am I modeling work-life balance?
9. How well do I know my collective agreement?
10. What further knowledge and skills do I need to improve my quality of worklife?

CLINICAL/TEAM LEADERS

1. When I have a conflict with another nurse, do I manage it first by approaching the person or do I do nothing?
2. How do I manage negative workplace behavior? Do I have the appropriate skills to manage untoward behavior?

3. What are the impacts of intergenerational issues in my workplace on the quality of care?
4. Do I suggest forums and feedback sessions about how things are going within our intergenerational team?
5. Do I build meetings and space that will inspire conversations?
6. How frequently do I provide positive feedback to the nursing staff, my manager, nurse educator, shop steward and others?
7. What can I do to support creating healthy intergenerational relationships in our organization?
8. How well do I know my contract?
9. How can I promote and support the union's direction and role in addressing intergenerational issues?
10. How can I work with others to facilitate positive interactions among team members and promote healthy intergenerational relationships?

CLINICAL NURSE EDUCATORS

1. How do I inspire or influence others to do the right thing in our professional relationships for the sake of patient care?
2. How often do I discuss or refer to the *Standards* and *Code* when working with the staff?
3. Do I have the tools and resources to support my colleagues in

- an intergenerational nursing environment?
4. What are the impacts of intergenerational issues in my workplace on the quality of care?
 5. Do I suggest forums and feedback sessions about how things are going within our intergenerational team?
 6. How frequently do I provide positive feedback to the nurses, managers, clinical leaders, shop stewards and others?
 7. What can I do to influence my nurse educator colleagues to help improve intergenerational issues?
 8. How can I promote and support the union's direction and role in addressing intergenerational issues?
 9. Do I understand the demographic profile of the union and can I identify issues of concern?
 10. Do my education materials appeal to the interests and skills of the various generations?

NURSE MANAGERS AND HEALTH SERVICE MANAGERS

1. How often do I discuss or refer to the collective agreement when working with the staff?
2. Am I accountable for all my actions?

3. Do I have the appropriate skills to manage untoward behavior?
4. How would I define our workplace culture and how do others perceive the quality of workplace relationships?
5. When staff identify any intergenerational issues, am I really hearing what they are saying?
6. Does the style of my staff meetings appeal to members of different generations and do I create forums for feedback about how things are going within our intergenerational team?
7. Do I invite or create inspiring agendas that include conversation time?
8. How frequently do I provide positive feedback to the staff, the nurse educator, shop steward and others?
9. Does my feedback create opportunities for learning, growing and changing?
10. How comfortable am I in sitting down with the union to discuss quality of worklife and intergenerational issues?

Actions for Bridging Gaps & Strengthening Relationships

Chapter 5

Relationship building to improve intergenerational dynamics begins with very basic steps and will vary depending on each person and workplace. Fundamentally, the actions are overall very similar and consideration must be given to what individuals and groups of nurses in their respective roles can control, have influence over, and also areas where they lack control.

Respectful and professional conversations are critical for successful outcomes. Intergenerational issues are both personal and organizational in scope. Resolution begins with positive intentions that recognize that change must happen in order to ensure that people work in healthy workplace environments — respecting the needs of the individuals — to realize excellence in care delivery.

While not all strategies are captured in this booklet, a basic framework is offered to launch the relationship-building process. It is important to remember that meaningful change in the workplace is best achieved when processes are inclusive and done in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. The framework for strengthening relationships should be examined and applied jointly by unions, employers, and with input from staff. Other resources may also be helpful to consider — change management is not easy, or there wouldn't be so many books about it! With

that in mind, consider the following steps as a starting point:

Framework for Strengthening Intergenerational Relationships

Reflect: Invite your team to reflect on their self-check questions from the previous section.

Educate: Develop an education plan about the generations tailored to needs of the group.

Create Conversations: Talk about the current situation in your workplace. Identify three key issues; prioritize and pick one to start the resolution process.

Plan: Develop strategies for a “new way of being” (improving the identified issues).

Act: Treat the “new way of being” as a “work-in-progress” or pilot project.

Evaluate: How did the strategy(ies) work? Get lots of feedback.

Adjust: Tweak the process if needed, and also over time.

Change: Embed changes in the workplace to ensure that expectations are formalized and routine.

Key Considerations for Moving Forward

The following is a recap of suggested strategies and solutions captured in CFNU's report *From Textbooks to Texting: Addressing issues of intergenerational diversity in the nursing workplace*. The list below provides a dynamic and collaborative point from which we can consider next steps to resolving chronic quality of worklife issues that are in urgent need of attention in health care workplaces. The items listed below came directly from nurses across Canada. We encourage you to consider how the following strategies might fit into your workplace as we move forward to bridge the intergenerational gap.

Explore ways to increase support/opportunities for:

- Union education and professional development
- Flexible scheduling of shifts and vacations
- Mentorship programs that support both protégés and mentors
- Innovative workplace practices
- Longer union orientation for nurses
- Education about diversity within the workplace
- Education resources both on-site and through the web
- Helping members and managers better understand and apply the collective agreement
- Collaborating with educators to improve intergenerational communication
- Reinforcing the requirement for respect in the workplace to improve quality of worklife

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This booklet represents a stepping stone for unions to address intergenerational relationship issues that can impact the quality of worklife and care in health care environments. It focuses on what unions and individual members can do to improve situations where relationships are strained and help is needed. It is important to recognize that, no matter how committed to improving relationships, individual nurses cannot manage this situation alone.

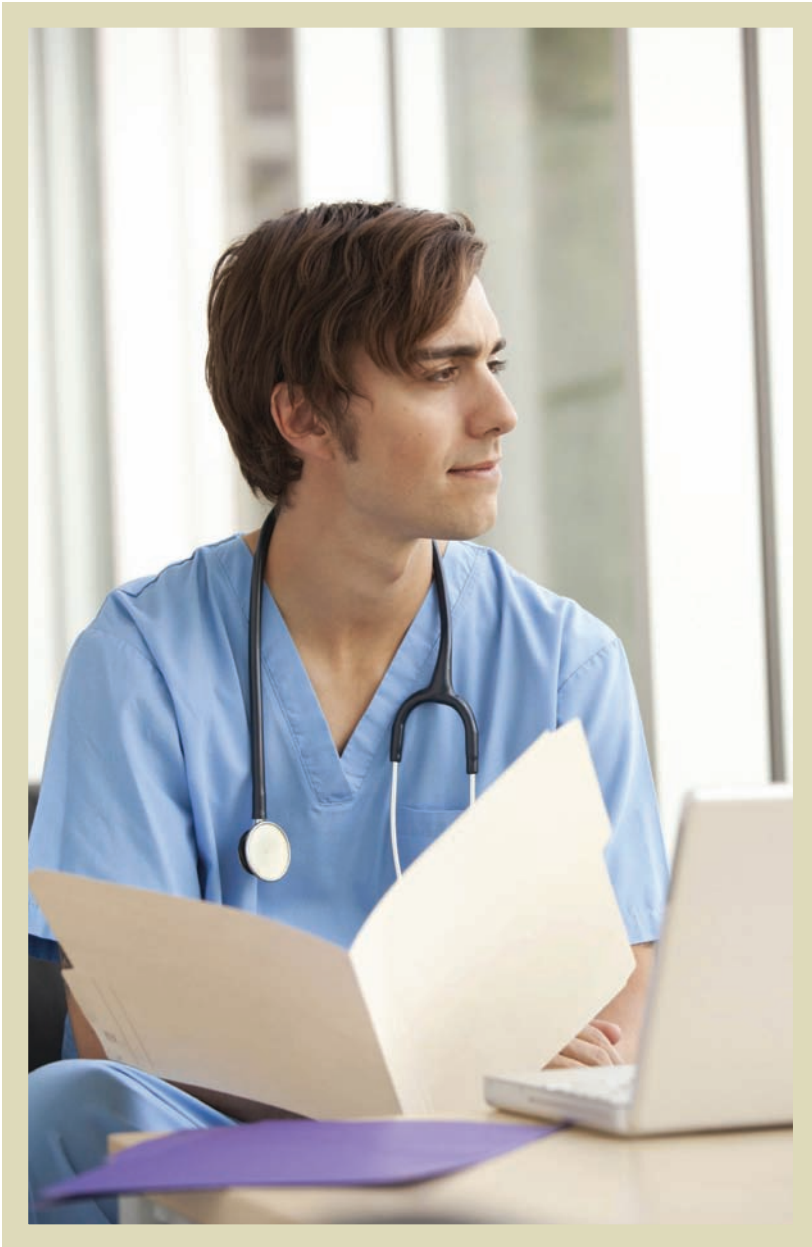
Intergenerational relationship problems in the workplace are a symptom of deeper organizational issues. Progress will require a significant collaborative effort of many key stakeholders and leaders who are committed to a new way of relating to

one another. Building relationships that are respectful, grounded in trust-building behaviors, and focused on the greater good will enhance the well-being of staff and ultimately the people that need us the most — our patients and clients.

There is an exciting opportunity on the horizon for unions to take the lead in engaging others to create environments where people want to work and where the quality of care is second to none. Solidarity in relationships is on the brink of expanding to include collaborative individuals who are willing to change in order to create a better worklife future.

We invite you to join us in building this future, this new way of being... together.

Did you know?



Generation Y (Millennials) were the first generation to grow up after the introduction of the Internet. Widespread use and access to the Internet began in the early 1990s, making Generation Y the first to grow up with it. This generation is widely accepted as the most tech-savvy, media literate and educated generation in the workforce today.

Recommended Readings

Barb's work on this project with CFNU was greatly inspired by a number of authors and their works dedicated to the subject of workplace diversity. She would like to acknowledge in particular:

Canadian Nurses Association. (2008). *Code of ethics for registered nurses*. Ottawa: Author.

BCNU (2009). *Four generations, four approaches to work: Mentoring across the generations*. Presented at the Thriving and Surviving at Work BCNU's 3rd Annual Nursing Week Conference, May 2009.

Beck, J. C. & Wade, M. (2004). *Got game: How the gamer generation is reshaping business forever*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press.

Duxbury, L. (2008). *You, me, and them: Dealing with generational differences in the workplace*. Presentation to the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia Nursing Leadership Conference, May 2008.

Hankin, H. (2005). *The new workforce: Five sweeping trends that will shape your company's future*. New York: AMACOM.

Michaels, E, Handfield-Jones, H., & Axelrod, B. (2001). *The war for talent*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Books & Reports

Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R. & Switzler, A. (2002). *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Scott, S. (2004). *Fierce Conversations; Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group.

Stone, D., Patton, B. & Heen, S. (1999). *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. New York: Penguin Books.

Stowkowski, L. (2008). *Old, but Not Out: The Aging Nurse in Today's Workplace*. <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/585454>

Wortsman, A. & Crupi, A., (2010). From Textbooks to Texting: Addressing issues of intergenerational diversity in the nursing workplace. Ottawa: Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions

Journal Articles

Carver L. & Candela L. (2008). Attaining Organizational Commitment Across Different Generations Of Nurses. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 16, 984-991.

Cowin, L., Duchscher, J.E.B. (2004). Multigenerational Nurses in the Workplace. *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 34 (11), 1-9.

Duchscher, J.E.B. (2001). Out in the Real World. *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 31(9), 426-439.

Kramer, L. (2010). Generational Diversity. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, 29 (3), 125-128.

Kupperschmidt, B., (May 31, 2006). Addressing Multigenerational Conflict: Mutual Respect and Carefronting as Strategy. *OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*. Vol. 11 No. 2, Manuscript 3.

Walker, K. (2007). Fast track for fast times: Catching and keeping generation Y in the nursing workforce. *Contemporary Nurse*, 24(2), 147-158.

Wilson, B., Squires, M., Widger, K., Cranley, L., & Tourangeau, A. (2008). Job satisfaction among a multigenerational nursing workforce. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 16, 716-723.

Web

Your Union's website is full of information and resources on education and resources to support healthy workplaces:

Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU)	www.nursesunions.ca
British Columbia Nurses' Union (BCNU)	www.bcnu.org
United Nurses of Alberta (UNA)	www.una.ab.ca
Saskatchewan Unions of Nurses (SUN)	www.sun-nurses.sk.ca
Manitoba Nurses Union (MNU)	www.nursesunion.mb.ca
Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA)	www.ona.org
Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec (FIQ)	www.fiqsante.qc.ca
New Brunswick Nurses Union (NBNU)	www.nbnu.ca
Nova Scotia Nurses' Union (NSNU)	www.nsnu.ns.ca
Prince Edward Island Nurses' Union (PEINU)	www.peinu.com
Newfoundland and Labrador Nurses' Union (NLNU)	www.nlnu.ca

Nursing the Future: The Voice of the New Graduate	www.nursingthefuture.ca
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Nursing the Future (NTF) is a federally registered non-profit organization aimed at developing and guiding newly graduated nurses as they move from the role of nursing student into the world of professional nursing practice. NTF is committed to supporting, providing a collegial network for, and professionally empowering the newest members of our nursing community. NTF believes that the continued development and professional success of new nursing graduates is vital to optimizing health and health care. Additional publications and resources are available at: www.letthelearningbegin.com

NurseONE	www.nurseone.ca
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NurseONE is a national, bilingual web-based health information service designed for the Canadian nursing community. The goal of NurseONE is to provide quick access to credible, up-to-date health care information to support nurses in Canada in delivering effective, evidence-based care, and to help them manage their careers and connect to colleagues, regardless of where or when they work.

About the Author

Over the course of thirty years, Barb Fry has held staff nurse, teaching and managerial positions, specializing in psychiatric mental health nursing.

Today, as a business owner and adult educator, Barb applies her knowledge of relational learning in the workplace to facilitate quality of worklife improvement for many different industries.

Her latest book, *Fast facts for the clinical nurse manager: Managing and changing workplace in a nutshell* (2010), is attracting the attention of nurse managers, team leaders and charge nurses to assist them in meeting the challenges that impact the quality of nurses relationships and patient care outcomes.

For more information about Barb's work, visit her website www.barbfry.com