Promoting Clinical Inquiry with a Sacred Cow Contest
JoAnn Mick, PhD, RN, AOCN, NEA-BC
Harris County Hospital District, Houston TX

Problem:
As nurses examine practices and actions in the work setting, they begin to identify many traditional practices that have no supporting rationale. These traditional practices, or Sacred Cows, can be costly and often consume nursing time without providing good outcomes.

Evidence:
Development of nurses’ skills to identify and ask appropriate clinical questions is one of several essential requirements to ensure an evidence-based profession.

Strategy:
Brown’s Sacred Cow Contest (1993) provides a creative strategy to promote clinical inquiry and generate interest in EBP.

Practice Change:
Submission guidelines and an entry form were developed for a Sacred Cow Contest. Entries were accepted for seven prize categories: Cash Cow, Mad Cow, Holy Cow, I never saw a purple cow, ‘til the cow comes home, Don’t have a cow, and Put the cow out to pasture.

Evaluation:
The Sacred Cow Contest inspired a review of current nursing practices to determine if they were evidence-based or required changes to optimize patient outcomes.

Results:
One hundred eighteen entries were submitted by nurses from both inpatient (n= 97, 82%) and outpatient settings (n= 21, 18%). Both individual nurse (n= 90, 76%) and nursing team (n= 28, 24%) entries were received. Nurses questioned practices that were categorized according to seven identified themes: Nursing practice (n= 38, 32%); Policy and procedure (n= 24, 20%); Administrative, i.e. schedule, staffing, and evaluation processes (n= 13, 11%); Physician order-related (n= 13, 11%); Supplies (n= 13, 11%); Documentation and use of paper (n= 10, 9%); and Customer service, i.e. wait time, appointments and scheduling (n= 7, 6%).

Recommendations:
Best practices in patient care occur when providers continually ask questions about treatments and interventions, search for and evaluate the evidence to support or refute traditional practices, implement best evidence, and evaluate outcomes.

Lessons Learned:
As individuals and/or groups of nurses question current nursing practice, they can begin to recognize relationships between scientific evidence, best practice recommendations, clinical decision-making, and patient outcomes.

Bibliography: