Problem: In order to change hospital processes and improve patient care outcomes, the Nursing profession needs to play a pivotal role in the healthcare transformation movement.

Evidence: Reports published by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) identify hospitals as stressful, unsafe places where unnecessary errors result in negative patient outcomes. The most recent IOM report, The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health (2010), points out that the United States has the opportunity to transform its healthcare system, and nurses can and should play a fundamental role in this transformation. However, a number of barriers prevent nurses from being able to respond effectively to rapidly changing healthcare settings and an evolving healthcare system.

Strategies: Barriers need to be overcome to ensure that nurses are well-positioned to lead change and transform healthcare. One barrier has been the lack of opportunity for nurses to interact as an equal partner with hospital leaders.

Practice Change: In 2010, hospital administrators initiated weekly "Patient Safety Rounds" as a mechanism to increase staff knowledge regarding safety-related issues, such as: prevention of infection. At the conclusion of the rounds, administrators ask staff if they have any safety concerns. Often led by direct care nurses, an open dialogue takes place between employee and employer. "Patient Safety Rounds" have become a Structural Empowerment Model for Nursing, whereby direct care nurses are encouraged to identify safety-related problems and make evidence-based recommendations for changes that improve patient care outcomes.

Evaluation: The weekly "Patient Safety Rounds" have greatly enhanced trust, collegiality and teamwork among staff members at all levels of the organization.

Results: Many changes have occurred as a direct result of the weekly "Patient Safety Rounds". For example, a new role of Patient Safety Attendant was created. These staff members are educated to safely care for patients requiring constant observation. Subsequently, nursing assistants are not "pulled" to care for these patients and nurses have more help to assist them with patient care activities. As a result, significant improvement has been observed in both patient and staff satisfaction. Professional nursing practice is flourishing and patient outcomes have improved, as evidenced by Patient Falls and Hospital Acquired Pressure Ulcers far below national benchmarks (NDNQI).

Recommendations: Current structures and processes within the hospital hierarchy need to be changed in order to empower direct care nurses to lead healthcare transformation and improve patient care outcomes.

Lessons Learned: Given an opportunity to work collaboratively with influential hospital leaders, nurses provide extremely useful evidence-based information that promotes change and establishes a culture of safety in hospitals.

Bibliography: