

The Caring Educator Fellowship at Craig Hospital

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In 1988, I was hit by a drunk driver while riding my bike on the outskirts of Grand Junction. Suffering a spinal cord injury at the T12 level left me with lower body paralysis and limited ability to ambulate. It was through my experience as a patient in acute care and rehabilitation hospitals that the idea for the Caring-Educator Fellowship began to form. With subsequent graduate degrees in Exercise Physiology, Nursing and Spiritual Psychology the theoretic-

cal and methodological foundation were built. In 1996, I became the Coordinator of Patient and Family Education at Craig Hospital the place of my own rehabilitation program in 1988. Over the years, the Patient & Family Education Program has developed to provide a high-quality experience of learning offered to patients and families learning to live with the effects of catastrophic injury and change in their lives. Throughout the history of Craig Hospital, emphasis of educating the patient and family for a full life post-injury has been the cornerstone of quality care. Yet as the delivery of healthcare changes with increasing demands on time, greater reliability on technology and the complexity of the patient situation; attention to some elements of quality education may fall behind. It is my belief that the quality of patient and family education depends on each healthcare provider holding the qualities of a Caring Educator. Powerful learning takes place when the teacher is fully present, engaged with the learner and competent with the subject matter.

In 2010, 3 staff RNs became the first to enter this unique opportu-

nity as Caring Educator Fellows to learn the art and science of caring as rehabilitation nurses at Craig Hospital. The Caring Educator Fellowship is an opportunity for current staff nurses to actively participate in personal, professional and project development through a mentored, 10 month fellowship experience. Creative budgeting allows for each nurse to have 2 hours of paid time per week to work on the project as well as 2 full education leave days for experiential education. Project development involves selecting a project that has meaning for the nurse; must pertain to patient and family education and have a tangible result. Personal growth and learning are supported through reflective journaling, monthly mentor meetings to explore issues that may get in the way of effective patient care and learning a more effective communication style. Professional development is encouraged by appropriate literature review, networking with peers and expanding professional contacts within the hospital organization. At the completion of the Fellowship, participants are expected to make a formal presentation at a Nurse Practice Council meeting describing their project

and experience of the Fellowship. In addition to the individual work of each Fellow, two group learning experiences are part of the year. A day on a high ropes challenge course co-facilitated with Outward Bound instructors and myself. Each Fellow was asked to invite peer staff nurses to join in the day of personal challenge, risk-taking and team work development. As the challenges of climbing up a rock wall, scaling tall poles and leaping off a high platform for the trip down a zip line, issues of how to take this experience back into the workplace were discussed. In September, the group of Fellows and me will explore new ways of

growth and learning while working with horses. This hands-on, interactive session will combine equine-assisted growth and learning activities as well exploration of personal styles of communication and presence. Each of these unique experiential learning sessions is meant to focus back onto the qualities of being a Caring Educator: self awareness, compassionate caring and pushing the known limits.

Terry Chase has been involved in the health and wellness field for almost 30 years as an educator, rehabilitation nurse, psychotherapist and program developer. Dr. Chase came to Craig Hospital in

1996 and has primary responsibility for the development, implementation and evaluation of patient and family education programs. Terry has published widely and presented many times in the field of health promotion and rehabilitation as well as consulted on projects around the US. In addition to her responsibility as Patient & Family Education Program Coordinator; she has been instrumental in the development of the Complementary and Alternative Medicine Program, the In-patient Equine Program and most recently the Caring Educator Fellowship.

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