

## Nursing Leaders on the High Ropes Course

**By Terry Chase, MA, ND, RN**  
*Patient & Family  
Education Coordinator  
Craig Hospital, Englewood, CO*



*It's not the critic who counts.  
Not the man who points out  
where the strong man stumbled  
or where the doer of great deeds  
could have done them better.*

*The credit belongs to the man  
who is actually in the arena.  
Whose face is marred by dust  
and sweat and blood. Who  
strives valiantly, who errs and  
comes up short again and again.*

*And who, while daring great-*

*ly, spends himself in a worthy  
cause so that his place may not  
be among those cold and timid  
souls who know neither victory  
or defeat.*

*Theodore Roosevelt*

The words of Theodore Roosevelt began the day on the high ropes course on a bright sunny summer day in June of 2011. Fifteen of Craig Hospital's finest nursing staff took part in a day-long high ropes course experience that took them out of their comfort zone and into a zone of growth and learning. The ropes course day is a part of the 2011 Caring-Educator Project that is focused on mentoring nursing staff members in personal, professional and project development. Participants were a cross section of nursing administration, clinical coordinators and staff nurses. All showed up ready to be challenged early and proceeded through the day in great form. This day was all about pushing the edges of personal comfort zones, expanding self-confidence and learning about strengths.

Specifically, the ropes course day was included for participants to

explore personal risk-taking, learn from others' perspectives, stretch themselves to new learning and have fun! This day-long course was designed to promote personal and professional development beyond everyday practice in rehab nursing care. Often as rehab nurses we are asking patients to take risks and to go beyond their level of comfort...with this ropes course experience nurses learned first-hand that there is more to risk taking than just going for it. Actually having the known experience of risk and pushing perceived limits is different than just telling someone to "do it". The elements of trust, compassion and communication are key to success in any risk considered.

The ropes course experience was guided and directed by two outstanding staff members of the Colorado Outward Bound-Denver Center and was held at the high ropes course on the grounds of Highlands Ranch HS. The course activities included technical instruction on climbing equipment, belaying and communication as well as group initiatives, problem-solving situations and high elements such as climbing a 40-

foot pole or rock wall to reach a static line or log, walk across and then be rappelled down all the while being supported by a team of belayers below. Craig Hospital nursing staff also experienced the thrill of a zip line starting about 45-feet above ground and travelling approximately 50 yards. The final challenge of the day as a group was to lift and pull all members up and over the “the wall” which was 15 feet of wall with no hand holds, grips or ladders to use as aids. At the end of the day, participants had learned about themselves, each other and had a blast in a day of challenge, hard-work and discovery. The first-ever Craig Hospital Ropes Course was a success....all survived, happy and healthy.

Experiencing the ropes course is one way to push personal limitations and develop compassion for self and others in new situations. In rehab, nurses are working with patients and families who have experienced catastrophic injuries, involving the brain and spinal cord. Working with these types of patients can strain the resolve of the nursing staff. Having a day to push their own limits, work with other staff members and leaders as well as learn something new about themselves is a unique way to stimulate growth.

Outcomes of the day are echoed through the words of the participants.

- I feel lighter, more driven, refreshed. On a personal level, there are not many things that I do in my everyday life that are just for me and stress is high a lot of the time. When I was

standing on that platform, digging deep, finding the courage to take the plunge, it was just about me. I did that for me and as you know I was overcome with emotion.

- To get up the rock wall I had to overcome my fear. Not my fear of heights, but my fear of trusting myself. I had to have confidence in my own ability to judge a situation and make appropriate choices. This is a lesson I will carry with me into every area of my life.

For many the day was about building connections with self, peers and management on the high ropes course.

- It was wonderful to build connections with people that I don't get to see very often. It is so nice to see people in different roles, to get support from people that I am usually supporting.
- I thoroughly enjoying going through the ropes (literally) with nursing co-workers and managers alike. It definitely strengthened my connection with my peers and enabled me to build my trust and feeling of support by others.
- I felt more connected with not only my peers who were present but with myself through this unique experience. Thank you for this opportunity for growth.

Through the events of the day and the strenuousness of the course, participants reported developing compassion for self and others.

- I feel it absolutely helps us to come back to work and translate our experiences into compassion and support for our patients and families.
- The opportunity to participate in this ropes course forced me to go beyond my normal comfort level and seek out a personal challenge. It allowed me to see the other members in the group in a whole different light. While we often depend on each other at work for routine clinical requirements, we do not count on each other to “lift us up” this was enlightening and personally fulfilling for me.

*...Without self-discovery, a person may still have self confidence, but it is a self confidence built on ignorance and it melts in the face of heavy burdens. Self discovery is the end product of a great challenge mastered, when the mind commands the body to do the seemingly impossible, when courage and strength are summoned to extraordinary limits for the sake of something outside the self--a principle, an onerous task, another human life.*

*Kurt Hahn, Founder Outward Bound*

*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 Comple-*

*mentary and Alternative Medicine Program, the In-patient Equine Program and most recently the Caring Educator Fellowship.*

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