



BULLETIN

Paperwork isn't pointless

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Nu Lu was frustrated.

As a physiotherapist at Vancouver General Hospital, she needed to get her patients up and moving. The rehabilitation she and her fellow physios provide is important - if it didn't get done, the patients didn't get to go home. But many of them were on short oxygen lines attached to the wall, and while portable oxygen units were on hand, hospital policy firmly states that only nurses or respiratory therapists are able to set them up, and they were not always readily available. At the end of each shift, patients remained unseen, their stays prolonged.

Problems like these are not uncommon. The health care system is a complex one, and small things can have very big implications for patient care and, ultimately, for the cost of providing that care.

Nu knew that something needed to be done, so she took action.

"We started filling in incident reports stating that this was unsafe," explained Nu. "If physiotherapists like me can't do an assessment for the patient, the nurses can't work safely because they don't know how much assistance the patient needs. Ultimately that holds up discharge because if the patient is limited to the bedside, they never get a chance to walk far enough to get well and go home."

Nu says she encouraged her fellow physios to fill out an incident report each and every time they were unable to get their patient connected up to the portable oxygen tanks.

"We did that for about a week, and then our supervisor just said 'stop, no more reports, we'll get this fixed.' And about two weeks later, it was. I've never seen a change happen so quickly."

Nu, now an HSA steward, agrees that workplace rules and paperwork can be time consuming and frustrating, but cheerfully insists a little patience and persistence can pay off.

"We spend a lot of time complaining about things, but if we spent that time filling out reports we'd actually solve a lot of these problems. People don't like filling them out because they don't think they go anywhere. But they do, and there has to be a response."

Nu's approach has already solved a separate issue around health and safety at her worksite, and she's looking for ways to solve more problems.

"I say don't get upset by the rules. Use them to fix things."

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