**SE2 : The structure(s) and process(es) that enable nurses at all levels to participate in professional organizations at the local, state, and national levels. Include international participation, if any.**

By virtue of our Vigilance Nursing Model and organizational mission statement, Riverside Medical Center sets the stage to encourage and enable nurses from all settings and roles to participate in professional organizations. The journey and investment to this end has been a path of shared decision making. In keeping with our values of partnership, integrity, excellence and stewardship, this venture has been rewarded with nurses gaining the knowledge and confidence to embrace the uniqueness of each patient and work to provide the best health care available.

**Structure and Process: Nursing Leaders Encourage Professional Memberships During Appraisals**

Riverside Medical Center conducts annual performance appraisals to evaluate both the art and science of nursing practice, commitment to ANA standards and our nursing model and organizational mission—and conduct a formal conversation to establish professional developmental goals. In some cases, job descriptions have been modified at the nursing leader level to require professional memberships and participation-to help lead the way.

Integrated within that developmental conversation with all staff—but more strongly encouraged for high performing nurses is the recommendation to join a professional nursing organization. Many leaders (Directors) maintain memberships with professional nursing organizations such as AONE, AACN, ARRN, and AORN. These leaders speak eloquently about the value of professional organizations. As Sherry Mayes, RN, MSN and Director of Trauma Services shared, "Belonging to a professional organization is part of my job description and even if it were not, I would aspire to belong for the cutting edge knowledge and professional development." Leaders like Sherry lead the way, sharing their perspective and bringing in information from their professional journals to encourage development—leaving it in break rooms to read.

One barrier heard from nurses, especially during these economic times, is the expense of a professional membership and a request for Riverside to help.

**Structure and Process: Nursing Excellence Fund Provides Financial Support for Professional Memberships**

The process by which nurses at Riverside Medical Center are encouraged to join professional organizations has been embedded in our mission but was accentuated and funding supported through the establishment of the Nursing Excellence Fund in 2007. The Nursing Excellence fund provides a financial support structure for “self-starter” nurses to obtain advanced nursing degrees or...
become certified and join their corresponding professional organizations – and answers our nurses’ request for financial assistance. In that manner, a process is supported that continues the nurse’s development beyond certification attainment—but supports certification renewals and ongoing professional development. In fact, anyone receiving certification funding is automatically funded for the accompanying professional membership to continue feeding professional development.

The Nursing Excellence Fund was a visionary step initiated by Riverside Medical Center’s Foundation Department, our CNO/COO and senior executive team, and our medical staff, and decisions on administering this funding are made by direct care nurses and leaders who are members of the Patient Care Council’s Professional Development Council. The Nursing Excellence fund provided a financial foundation and has accomplished several facets to support the nursing profession at Riverside Medical Center such as national certification, degree completion and membership to professional organizations. The Fund relied totally on donations from the physicians, nurses, community members that were willing to invest in the advancement of nursing excellence. To date, the Nursing Excellence Fund has contributed $17,676.08 for national certifications and corresponding membership to professional organizations. This NEF funding has provided for completion of 14 certifications and 2 certification renewals since 2007 and as of the writing of this narrative (see SE 4 and SE 4 EO for details on certification goals achieved beyond just NEF funded-certifications as not every nurse chooses to use NEF funding). As part of the certification application for NEF funding, the applying nurse is encouraged to join the professional organization sponsoring the certification as sometimes, this results in lowering the certification exam fee. When the nurse doesn’t do this on the application, the Professional Development Council will call the nurse during their Council meeting to encourage the nurse to check that box—and will modify the application for him/her over the phone if consent is given. Thus, there is a structure and process from not only nursing leaders but also direct care nursing peers in place to encourage and fund membership in a professional nursing organization.

In addition to the development of this fund, a complete list of professional nursing organizations and ANCC certification opportunities were compiled and published to Riverside Medical Center’s web page by Professional Development Council for easy access by all staff 24-7 to not only provide a listing of certifications and their eligibility requirements in support of nurses’ journey for nursing excellence—but to also encourage their lifelong learning via easy access using an Internet link to their specialty-area professional nursing organization.

One of the greatest benefits for Riverside Medical Center of this endeavor to provide a structure and process for nurses to join professional organizations has been the ability to share professional journals; the availability of supported research, identifying additional resources and eventually seeing those principles
played out at the bedside with appropriate nursing care as we see on the 4Rehab unit.

4Rehab: Nursing Excellence Funding Supported Professional Membership and Inspired Nurses to Provide Stroke Patient Support

An example of collaboration and integration of care delivery standards was evidenced on Riverside Medical Center’s Rehabilitation nursing unit. 4 RNs took advantage of the Nursing Excellence Fund, joining their professional organization and completed requirements to become Certified Rehabilitation Registered Nurse (CRRN). These inspired nurses – Janice Stump and Barbara Hamilton have shared their knowledge gained through membership to Association of Rehabilitation Nurses (ARN) in multiple ways. They have used their unit meetings as a platform for sharing up-to-date, evidence based nursing standards for the rehabilitation unit, have shared articles with colleagues, maintained a library of journals and current information regarding their nursing specialty.

But even more than those steps, they came together and recognized a gap in our community related to stroke victims. Since the patient population on 4 Rehab includes many patients experiencing the aftermath of a stroke, the Rehab nurses have an acute firsthand vantage point of the changes in lifestyle occurring with this catastrophic event. A former RN, CRRN and Chairperson of the Professional Development Council, spent several weeks collecting data and realized our community had no support for stroke victims or their caregivers and families. Through diligent efforts on the part of the Rehab nurses, they collaborated with physicians, ancillary departments, patients and families to put together a plan to offer a support group. Their collaborative efforts took 6 months but they were able to contact and schedule presenters on stroke-related topics, coordinate meeting times and places, advertise to the community and the Riverside Medical Center-sponsored Stroke Support Group has become a reality. To the right and above is an example of their current Support Group agenda.

Their attentiveness and desire for this much-needed healthcare support came to fruition based on
short and long term goals established with the assistance of their professional organization's direction and input.

Each scheduled Support Group meeting is carefully designed in an attempt to meet the needs of the stroke victim and their loved ones. A 4Rehabilitation Nurse hosts each meeting with guest speakers that span the fields of Nursing, Clinical Neuropsychologist, Physical Therapist, Speech Therapist and manager of Riverside Health Equipment. The topics have included: Brain Attack, Coping with Stress, Healthy Holiday Food, Safe Exercise, Speech-Memory Problem Solving, and Medical Equipment – What is it for and how do I get it?

This program and our dedicated staff are a complement to the designation Riverside Medical Center achieved in May 2009 - Joint Commission Stroke Center of Excellence. With little marketing to patients initially, the first meeting had 11 patients and their loved ones in attendance.

**Professional Organizations Lead to Improving Chemotherapy Care**

For over five years, Dr. Sipahi, Medical Oncologist and Oncology Medical Director at Riverside, has annually endowed a scholarship for RNs specifically earmarked for advancement of education or certification related to the oncology field. As a result of Dr. Sipahi's generosity and vision, 8 RN's in 2008 and 7 RNs in 2009 were trained in chemotherapy administration, primarily from 2Med-Surg. Along with that extensive training and observed clinical practice, the RNs were encouraged to join and exposed to benefits of the professional organization, Society of Oncology Nurses. This endeavor drives the hands on clinical application to the standards of nursing for the oncology patient population. In the words of one of the recently certified RN Nichole Jones, "The chemotherapy certification training gave me a much broader understanding of the drugs used and the importance of watching the administration site and assessments of my patient."

As a direct result of the Chemotherapy Administration Certification Course and the efforts of Margaret Ondrey, clinical nurse specialist and member of the Society of Oncology Nurses, the staff who attend the monthly Chemotherapy Meeting have expanded their ambitions to raise the standard of practice for their nursing unit. The energy and enthusiasm began with the certification, but has been fueled by the associated *Clinical Journal of Oncology* to enhance the monthly Chemotherapy Meeting into a Chemotherapy Council which takes on pertinent issues such as documentation, policy review, and peer review for nursing care. This Council utilizes an interdisciplinary approach to review chemotherapy protocols to ensure safe adherence to the Chemotherapy / Biohazard guidelines in Riverside Medical Center’s documentation framework. Another outcome relates to a more comprehensive and better flow of charting so that all disciplines get a much improved view of the flow of patient events.
Riverside Medical Center’s Pharmacy Department collaborated with the members of the Chemotherapy Council in revamping the smart pump clinical formulary to match the pre- and post-chemotherapy medication regimen ordered by the physician. The long-term goals have been to improve patient safety and with collaboration of nursing and information from the Society of Oncology Nurses, provide the bedside nurse with the purpose and drive to lift the practice standards their nursing specialty.

**Participation in Sigma Theta Tau International Local Chapter**

The local chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International has been attended and led by registered nurses from Riverside for well over a decade in our community. As members and leaders, Riverside Medical Center RNs’ desire to provide quality nursing care as well as promote and restore health of our community has made them advocates of the professional organization that heralds those very concepts. Invitations initiated by these members' results in a higher degree of participation. At present (2009), the offices of President, Secretary and Nominating Chair are all held by Riverside nurses. The number of Sigma Theta Tau International active members who are Riverside nurses are 12. Riverside Medical Center’s representation is the highest for hospitals in our area. These nurses are supported with flexible scheduling in order to participate in these meetings and their membership is recognized as part of their annual performance appraisal in support of evidence-based practice and community involvement.

**Quest for More Involvement in Professional Organizations Continues**

The quest to involve more direct care nurses in their professional organizations continues to be a journey that Riverside Medical Center is willing to embrace. During the first quarter of 2009, a survey was conducted to identify direct care nurses’ professional organization memberships and to investigate avenues of improving the communication to RN’s regarding availability and existence of professional organizations particular to their area of practice / interest. As a result of that survey, we identified some specific actions to take in 2009 and 2010 to begin to increase the number of nurses who were members of professional organizations, which are as follows:

1. The comprehensive list of professional nursing organizations along with the link to access the online home page was re-marketed, updated and published to the Riverside's nursing web page (this list has been available since 2007 on Riverside's Intranet). This avenue of communication was then reinforced by nursing leadership from Women and Children’s Services, Emergency Department, Peri-Operative Services, Pediatrics, Rehabilitation and Telemetry - incorporating this tool as an agenda item for staff monthly unit
meetings and Unit Based Councils to encourage awareness of the options.

2. The Professional Development Council made a web page for our nurses with easy access to Evidenced Based Practice researched the development of a Career Ladder in 2008 and 2009. The process for this Career Ladder included requiring professional organizational membership as one of the rungs on the ladder with a stipend to be paid annually based upon the level achieved on the ladder and is currently planned for review and modification after completion of the 2010 appraisals. The rationale for this is that the RN performance appraisals were significantly modified and implemented in 2009 using much of the content and standards from the career ladder to continue to raise the bar for nursing practice. As a result, before implementation, the career ladder will be modified following results of the 2010 appraisal process and may not be necessary given the appraisal redesign and the rewards that are intrinsic to the appraisal process (pay for performance).

3. Members of the American Nurses Association will advocate for the available resources to accommodate local participation with incentives for reduced membership fees. This was as a direct result of a 5 Tele nurse, Liberty Erfe, a nurse who applied her leadership skills to increasing the investment and involvement of staff nurses to this professional organization.

4. Members of professional organizations will consistently share their resources as a means of encouragement for qualified development. The champions of this process are Riverside’s Clinical Specialists, LaRee Shule and Margaret Ondrey.

5. Continue sharing stories internally and externally of how Riverside nurses’ professional organization memberships are making a difference in practice settings and in our community.

Our Journey Continues…

Our focus as an organization over the past three years has been to foster attainment of advanced degrees (BSNs) as opposed to professional memberships. As we mature on our professional development journey, we have over the past year, shifted our attention to now encouraging staff to join professional organizations. The time commitment to active participation in a professional organization can be far less than obtaining an advanced degree—and rich with developmental opportunities in your specialty area—especially for experienced nursing professionals. With our goals in hand and monitoring processes in place to drive memberships, we feel confident we will continue to see our numbers of staff joining organizations increase as more of our nurses complete their BSN and MSN degrees which is our current organizational focus.