

The new CAN program has people talking. But the real question for nurses is:

What Do You Want?



Newer nurses like Mariko Hacke, Staff Nurse 1, NICU, Children's at Egleston, say that one of the CAN program's biggest draws is that it offers lots of options nurses can explore to develop their careers.

When you get right down to it, the new Career Advancement for Nursing (CAN) program is pretty simple. It asks nurses what they want and then gives them the tools to go get it — without having to leave Children's in the process.

Take Jessica Hunt, for example. She's not really sure what she wants yet, and that's only natural. Not even two years out of nursing school, this R.N. is relatively new to her profession. She's now a Staff Nurse 2 in the TICU at Children's at Scottish Rite. She plans to continue her education one day. Maybe move into administration — or maybe not, because she likes bedside care, too. And she realizes that there may be times in the years ahead when family matters put professional goals on the back burner, at least for a while.

One thing Hunt is sure about is that she'd like to stay at Children's throughout her career. "I like it here," she says. "I came into this organization looking for support to grow, and I like the idea that Children's will enable me to take my career here in whatever direction I choose."

CAN provides more choices. Launched in January of this year, the program was designed to give nurses like Hunt just what they want — the freedom to choose the direction of their career at Children's and help in developing the skills to provide increasingly high-quality care for patients.

A team of 23 employees — including nurses of all experience levels and specialties — spent more than a year developing the CAN program. "Our goal was to update our career paths for nurses to reflect the goals of our organization and the needs of nurses of all experience levels with diverse career and life goals," explains Joyce Coleman, Vice President, Nursing and Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Executive.

What is the Career Advancement for Nursing (CAN) program?

- It's the new career path for inpatient nurses at Children's. After the initial rollout for inpatient nurses, the program will be expanded in the future to include other select hospital settings, including outpatient nurses.
- Based on a point system, it allows nurses to define their own career path through five categories of nursing.
- It offers tracks for managerial or clinical careers, defines specific educational and experiential requirements, and lets each nurse decide when and how to pursue those requirements.

By giving nurses career choices that let them focus on the areas of nursing they enjoy most, the CAN program also lets nurses make the choice to stay at Children's throughout their careers. In the past, for example, nurses who returned to school to become nurse practitioners had no choice but to leave Children's because there was no place for them on the career ladder. And getting promotions often meant leaving the

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bedside, which some nurses didn't want to do. "Now, those nurses who choose to grow their skills or focus on a particular area, such as bedside care, can also choose to stay here with us," says Shannon Dunlap, Manager, Clinical Operations, Children's at Egleston. "With CAN, we've created a place for those choices in our System."

Mariko Hacke likes the sound of that. "I've been at Children's for just over a year, so I think it's a good idea to have lots of options that nurses can explore for career development," says the Staff Nurse 1, NICU, Children's at Egleston. "Right now, I like the clinical aspect of nursing and working at the bedside, but I also like having the option to go into management or education later in my career if that's what I decide to do."

CAN is consistent. It's no secret that the old system of nursing levels was inconsistent. The CAN program addresses this issue by creating five categories of nurses and setting clear guidelines for the responsibilities of each category and the criteria for moving between them. "Under the old system, different units used different criteria for promotion and gave different responsibilities to nurses at the same levels," says Eileen Murray, Neonatal Nurse Educator, Children's at Egleston. "This wasn't an issue we had addressed when our campuses merged, so things worked very differently in different locations. As a result, it's been hard for nurses to transfer between campuses or between units."

Within the CAN process, nurses move through the five categories by demonstrating mastery of their professional nurse requirements (job duties or functions) and by acquiring a set amount of points, which are obtained through participation in activities such as workshops, acquiring certifications or degrees, serving on committees or participating in research — things many nurses already did but may not have received credit for under the old system. The amount of points necessary and points given for each activity are clearly stated, and the point system is overseen by a newly-established Career Advancement for Nursing Council to ensure consistency.

"With this structure in place, nurses now know exactly what they need to do to advance and can determine how best to achieve their goals," Murray states. ►

CAN is personal. Since CAN is self-directed and self-paced, it also helps nurses direct their career at a pace that works well with the rest of their lives. While some nurses may want to make family responsibilities the top priority for a time, others may opt to achieve professional goals more quickly.

“The goal is not to discard the experience of our long-time nurses,” Coleman says. “In many cases, the program will simply be giving them credit for things they already choose to do to help newer nurses or pass on their knowledge.”

“If someone wants to move into a certain area of specialization or category of nursing quickly, CAN allows them to set their pace, accumulate points rapidly and achieve that goal,” notes Diane Nelson, Nurse Educator, Children’s at Scottish Rite. “But if an individual doesn’t want to devote

the time and energy right now, they can opt to obtain fewer points. By allowing nurses to choose their level of commitment, the program shows respect for every individual in every role.”

Of course, some of our more experienced nurses liked things just the way they were. With CAN, they won’t be penalized for making the choice not to go back to school. “The goal is not to discard the experience of our long-time nurses,” Coleman says. “It’s quite the opposite, in fact. We want to let these nurses determine how they want to make the most of their experience — perhaps by educating others or by serving on a committee or by focusing on excellent bedside care.”

Many of these nurses engage in these activities already, Coleman notes. “In many cases, the program will simply be giving them credit for things they already choose to do to help newer nurses or pass on their knowledge,” she says.

CAN raises the bar. “We have great nurses — there’s no doubt about that,” Nelson says. “But the danger is that we

get complacent in just being great. Our mentality should be that we always want to improve our skills for the benefit of our patients.”

The CAN program aims to help nurses do just that by requiring some certifications, such as Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS), for all nurses. Those wishing to move into the more advanced categories on the ladder will need advanced degrees — and all nurses will take some continuing education each year. “There have been a lot of questions about this aspect of the program and some fears too, which are understandable,” Nelson says. “It’s natural for us to worry about when we’ll find the time to attend classes or obtain certifications.”

By providing greater flexibility, more individualization and higher standards, the CAN program also will improve the quality of life for nurses, along with the quality of care provided to patients.

Yet many nurses will find that meeting the requirements of the CAN program won’t take additional time or activities because its comprehensive point structure gives credit for activities that most caregivers can complete as part of a regular workday. And by providing greater flexibility, more individualization and higher standards, the CAN program also will improve the quality of life for nurses, along with the quality of care provided to patients.

“This program supports our quality initiatives and represents a tremendous commitment on the part of Children’s as an organization,” says Cyndi Fowler, Director, Patient Care Services, Children’s at Scottish Rite. “It shows how willing our leadership is to invest in us as individuals and as

professionals. It also tells me that they understand the value that nurses provide, because they support a program designed to help each of us enjoy our work and stretch to do our best wherever and however we work. I believe that our nurses will rise to the occasion.”



Work-life balance is important to Danielle Humberstone, Staff Nurse 3, Aflac Cancer Center and Blood Disorders Service, Children’s at Scottish Rite, seen here reading to her son, 18-month-old Jack. The new CAN program offers nurses the flexibility to choose their level of commitment and is self-directed, allowing nurses to direct their career at a pace that works well with the rest of their life.



Barbara Hardin (right), Staff Nurse 3, demonstrates some of the technical aspects of an incubator bed to Kaylen Anthony, Staff Nurse 2, NICU, Children’s at Egleston. Mentoring others is an integral part of the CAN program.



CAN supports learning: Susan Roth (left), Staff Nurse 1, CICU, Children’s at Egleston, and Janie Ko, Patient Care Tech 1, PICU, Children’s at Scottish Rite, learn cardiac massage techniques for infants at a Children’s-sponsored CPR class.