

Work Outside Your Comfort Zone

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By Melissa Martin, RHIA, CCS, CHTS-IM

Have you ever taken on a special project outside of your comfort zone? My special project this year has been building an outpatient surgery center (OSC) from the ground up. Leadership, Strategic/Organizational Management, Change Management, and Project Management are all curriculum domains that have prepared me to “step out” for this project. And while these have been helpful in preparing me to get started, I have encountered even more of the curriculum domains in action throughout my journey working on the OSC.

The project began in June, but work started even before then, as a Certificate of Need (CON) had to be filed with the State of West Virginia for approval. Knowledge of healthcare law is important for special projects such as this one. For example, CONs are legally required for expansion projects, new services, and certain pieces of equipment in over 35 states across the country. CON goals are to control costs and market share.

The first step was a thorough review of the CON to make sure we stayed within the approved financial management parameters—another important curriculum area. This included the cost of the project as well as square footage and the number of operating and procedure rooms based on our projected volumes—information we had thanks to healthcare statistics.

We analyzed specific research methods to create a facility focused on a healing environment. I was lucky to be working with our vice president of operations, who has an interest in evidence-based design for healing environments. Research from The Center for Health Design has shown that a strong emphasis on nature, color, light, and wayfinding have a significant impact on safety and culture, and all combined will decrease medical errors, hospital-acquired infections, stress, and staff turnover. Work design and process improvement, curriculum areas that also proved imperative in this project, began with a review of the initial plans prepared as part of the CON. These plans were basic, outlining the footprint of the building based on the approved square footage and number of operating and procedure rooms required per the CON.

We met weekly with the architects, requiring vendor/contract management to design each room within the footprint to meet our specifications. Detailed vendor/contract management started as we requested quotes for our operating room and sterile processing equipment. It was so interesting to hear about the innovative technologies ranging from robotics to autoclaves—knowledge that I was able to add to my toolbox after working on the project.

The next step required even more leadership and project management and was very gratifying. It was time for the official groundbreaking, including executive leadership speakers and many local government dignitaries and the media. Identifying the best location from a media perspective was important but had to be coordinated with engineers and site crew to ensure safety as well. Planning an event of this nature can be challenging but certainly took the project from paper to reality.

My goal in sharing this experience with you is to inspire big thinking. Use your skills and “step out” for a special project this year.

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