

## An Invasive Disaster: A Cath Lab Without Leadership

By Jason Bisesi

### When Making Hiring Decisions, Which is More Valuable: Education or Experience?

In many cases, this long-debated question causes delays when deciding on the ideal candidate to hire into a vacant role in a healthcare organization. Often setting a baseline on both ends of what can be viewed as a wide spectrum, and specifically focusing on the key attributes required for the position can help with the vetting process, though indeed, the perfect person depends on many organizational and programmatic factors.

In working with clients across the country, Corazon has seen requirements too strict, too loose, and at all points in between. Unfortunately, rigidity in candidate requirements (in terms of either education or experience) can minimize the number of candidates that are evaluated, thereby lengthening a search and placement process, and subsequently leaving entire departments without leadership for too long.

Within the cardiac cath lab setting, Corazon finds that organizations that are set on hiring only nurses to fulfill leadership roles can risk negative impacts on program operations, team morale, and overall fiscal performance due to a key vacancy. The truth is, there just aren't enough nurses to go around! In fact, as cath labs and cardiac programs expand in all types of markets, the demand for program leadership is vastly outpacing the supply of experienced nursing professionals who can easily transition into a service line leadership role.

According to Becker's Hospital Review, cardiology continues to generate the second-most revenue of any specialty within a hospital. With this in mind, it is imperative to identify a cath lab leader that can push the program forward to provide quality care AND generate volume for the hospital, regardless of their educational background. Understandably, hospitals have been pushing for cath lab manager/director-level positions to carry a nursing license. In some instances, this can make sense due hospital restrictions such as a unionized organization or specific reporting structure. Other times, the credential is deemed necessary due to a young cath lab staff looking for an individual willing and able to scrub in during cases. However, Corazon believes that mandating the director-level position be filled by a nurse can be short-sighted in many ways, which can potentially compromise what could be an otherwise straightforward search and hire process.



Figure 1. What is learned from EXPERIENCE (vs education).

### There is No Substitute for Real-World Experience...

When identifying an individual to lead a cath lab, Corazon advocates that a candidate's experience should perhaps be given almost equal weight in comparison to education. This is not to say that every candidate, vacant position, hospital situation, etc., are the same — certainly differences exist that cause certain candidate attributes to be more or less important.

Table 1. Characteristics of a good leader.
Trustworthy
Motivated
Organized
Willing and able to offer employee mediation
Experienced
Opportunistic

There will be times that a nurse is the most experienced candidate available, and other times a Registered Cardiovascular Invasive Specialist (RCIS) may be a better fit with experience. As Corazon completes candidate vetting for all types of cardiovascular clients, most have spent their entire careers in the cath lab. Their knowledge and experience has equipped them to lead; but, based on some specific parameters determined at the outset of the search, they are not given the opportunity to apply because they are lacking certain education or a degree.

Within the confines of the cath lab, as well as most other management-level positions, the leader must be comfortable mediating between staff and hospital leadership, organizing the lab schedule, maintaining program financials, and ensuring all subordinates work together towards a common programmatic goal. In order to be successful, a cath lab director can call upon years working in this clinical service as a solid foundation for identifying the appropriate route to accomplish these management tasks.

If an organization remains determined to promote or hire a nurse to fulfill an open cath lab director position, there may be another route. Corazon has found that interim management can be a catalyst to open some minds to other types of candidates. Identifying an interim manager with an RCIS or other training that supplements sound leadership abilities to temporarily lead the lab can be both a sound investment and a learning experience for all.

Corazon has experienced many instances where an organization required a registered nurse (RN) for a full-time leader, but was open to a non-nurse in an interim capacity. As time went on and the identified interim assignee worked collaboratively with leadership, physicians, nursing staff, and radiologic technologists to push the program to new heights, the nursing degree was less of a factor in finding the ideal fit. The assignee was brought on for a 90-day assignment, but based on the high levels of growth in the lab, along with recommendations from the physicians, he was hired in a full-time capacity.

*Note: This article is NOT intended to slight any individuals who have worked diligently to obtain nursing degrees, but rather to open minds that there are many important factors that can be considered when deciding who should lead one of the most profitable areas of the hospital. Leadership ability goes beyond one's initial training and to the character attributes that can lead to success — namely, leadership ...which is often not learned in a classroom, but rather rests in the knowledge and experience gained from time spent in the lab.*



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