

Management Education Gives Nurse New Confidence, Career Options

“After working as a nurse for 10 years—first in a cardiology unit then in the emergency medicine department—I had a good understanding of patient care,” says Romana Svobodova. “But, I really had a very limited view on the healthcare system as a whole and virtually no appreciation of the financial aspects of providing health services,” acknowledges the 37-year-old head nurse at Tabor County Ambulance Center in Czech Republic’s southern Bohemia region.

Svobodova’s view on the health system—and her opportunities for professional growth and development—was greatly enhanced, she contends, after she studied healthcare management at Prague Economic University’s Faculty of Management in the nearby town of Jindrichuv Hradec. After receiving a bachelor’s degree there in 2000, Svobodova enrolled in a master’s program, which she completed in June 2002. “Now I have a broader perspective that includes not only patient care, but the legal, economic, educational, operational, and managerial aspects of healthcare as well,” Svobodova says, noting that her classes gave her more insight into the system as a whole than many long-time practitioners.

Understanding healthcare is a service that must be paid for like any other commodity was one of the most important lessons Svobodova says she learned. In addition, she also came to appreciate the value of open dialogue and using a team approach to problem-solving. “What I learned from my professors made it possible for me to understand the business side of healthcare. I’m a much better manager now and I’ve learned how to make the most of our human resources,” she explains, stressing that it is important to make people feel like they are part of a greater whole.

While pleased with the content of her courses, Svobodova was initially disconcerted by their interactive structure. “The teaching style used by all my instructors was totally different from what my generation had experienced in school,” Svobodova observes, noting that she and her classmates were encouraged from day-one to voice their opinions and take an active role in discussions. “Really, this was unthinkable at first and I

must admit that many of us resisted the efforts of professors such as Dr. Stritecky who pushed us to speak out,” she says with a laugh. “But, as we got used to this type of give-and-take we began to talk in class and amongst ourselves with greater ease. I have even adopted some of these methods at work, encouraging input from the people I supervise.”



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ANDREJ LESECKY.

EMS nurse Romana Svobodova gained new insight and opportunities for professional growth from her healthcare management courses.

The courses not only affected Svobodova’s management style and contributed to her promotion to head nurse at the Ambulance Center, they also taught her the value of promoting the facility’s services. “Until 1993, the Ambulance Center was affiliated with the municipal hospital. Now, as a private company, we must focus on improving the quality and range of services we offer if we want to remain financially viable,” she says. To this end, Svobodova developed a way of raising the profile of the Center while, at the same time, giving back to the community. “I approached the local school administration and suggested a course that would teach children how to behave in emergency situations, call an ambulance service, and perform CPR and basic first aid.”

The idea was well-received by local educators and parents and, in January 2002, the courses were implemented in 21 schools throughout the county. “So far, my colleagues and I have held about 50 classes that include

Many remarkable changes in healthcare delivery throughout Eurasia have been realized over the past 12 years, yet sustainable reform depends on the skill of administrators who must manage existing programs and develop new ones capable of meeting the changing needs of their communities. AIHA’s Health Management Education Program has spearheaded a dramatic transformation of health professions education for both clinicians and administrators. To date, AIHA partners have helped establish 10 new undergraduate- and graduate-level degree programs in health management, along with numerous short-term courses related to facility administration. This is the story of a nurse who earned two degrees in health management and how she is applying these to her work at a private ambulance service in the Czech Republic; the story of one of her professors appears on the other side.

theoretical lectures on basic anatomy and practical exercises ranging from CPR and immobilizing a fractured bone to stopping bleeding and treating burns or frostbite,” Svobodova states, explaining that an average of 20 children aged 10-11 participate in the sessions, which meet three hours a week for one month.

“The children are very enthusiastic because the courses are so different from what they learn in school and parents are pleased that their kids will know how to respond appropriately if they are confronted with an emergency. In fact, two pairs of our ‘junior rescue workers’ represented Tabor County in a national competition and placed fifth and tenth out of a field of 31,” Svobodova reports.

“I’m very satisfied with my choice to pursue health management degrees,” she concludes. “Both personally and professionally I have broadened my understanding and my horizons. I’d like to stay in my current position and help my organization grow and I think what I have learned will allow me to do just that.”

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