



## Mary Oliphant: Teamwork makes for quality care

August 21, 2018

*Editor's note: This commentary is by Mary Oliphant, of Williston, who is retired from a 35-year nursing career.*



**A**t the University of Vermont Medical Center, the nurses union held a two-day strike on July 12 and 13 because issues concerning staffing levels and pay were not resolved. There are many questions and much controversy over the provision of hospital care. Hospitals can be defined as centers of medical advice, prognosis and healing, but in the eyes of the public their image is being questioned more and more frequently. It is probable that at some point in your life you will enter a hospital and become a patient.

You may be a Vermont farmer who nicks your leg on barbed wire and needs intravenous antibiotics to fight a skin infection. You may be a motor vehicle accident victim, rushed into the emergency room for life saving

treatment. You may be a mother or father entering the hospital with your listless, febrile child in their arms. Will you feel trust or vulnerability?

Amidst all the criticism of hospital care I want to tell you about a very positive experience I have had.

I graduated from the University of Massachusetts as a nurse 35 years ago and worked in many of the major medical centers in the Boston area as well as two community hospitals in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Four years ago I moved to Vermont and began work on the medical surgical unit at Central Vermont Medical Center, from which I just retired. CVMC, in Berlin, provides care for the 26 communities of central Vermont.

***“I feel this hospital provides better patient care than any hospital I have ever worked in.”***

The following are just a few examples to back up my statement. Every medical surgical unit I worked in required nurses on the day shift to care for five to six patients. At CVMC, I was rarely given more than four patients and when this occurred, it was done so apologetically. With fewer patients, I provided better care.

At every hospital where I worked I keenly felt the division between the hospital administration and the nursing staff. This was not the case at CVMC, from my experience, and this is very unusual. For example, one of my first shifts there...

***“I was amazed to see my nurse manager, Sarah Magdon, emptying patient linen baskets.”***

Nurse managers are responsible for supervising a nursing unit in a hospital. Taking on this leadership role means typically discontinuing direct care. Not at CVMC. I found that less division between administration and staff facilitated better communication, resulting in better patient care.

Nurses have great responsibility, at times needing to make acute treatment decisions. Throughout my career I oftentimes had patient-centered questions and concerns. At times I have felt frightened and insecure, without support. Not so at CVMC. My nurse educator, Kate Roche, was there when I needed her, guiding me through many difficult moments. Educational support enabled me to give better patient care.

***“Never before have I seen hospital workers with many different roles coming together and truly functioning as a team.”***

At CVMC, teamwork is the norm reflected by the doctor who helped me turn a patient to change the sheets, the environmental worker who searched the unit to tell me my patient was frightened, and the nursing assistant who raced into the room to prevent my patient from falling. I found that teamwork helped everyone provide better care.

I am not an expert on hospitals but from my nursing experience I know that this community hospital is a place of excellence, a place that I was proud to be a part of. Perhaps during this time of public questioning and complaints concerning hospital care you missed the fact that CVMC is doing a great job. Reflecting back on my 35 years as a nurse I have never known a hospital like this.