

Future forward: I am data



IT'S ALWAYS EXCITING to see nursing and nursing practice on the national stage at events like the ANA 2015 Quality Conference earlier this month. Conference theme makers got it right. The educational theme, “On the Front Line of Quality: The Future of Health Care,” calls out two important issues:

- The front line is key to quality.
- The future of health care is all about quality.

When these two facts are linked, grasp the most important reality of all: The nurse is crucial to the future of health care because the quality of care is in our hands. Why? First, nursing is the largest patient-care workforce. Second, an essential nursing role is documenting what we do. Third, nurses generate tremendous volumes of documentation. Thus, the topic of this month’s editorial: I am data.

Take a look outside of health care, and you see how much data are driving product creation, new technology, marketing, and future strategy. If you’re an online gamer, your Facebook page probably has ads that feature new e-games. If you’ve been searching Google for cold remedies or allergy-free pillows, you can expect to see coupons for cold medicine and allergy-free products in your email inbox (and snail-mailbox).

How are companies able to customize our Internet searches like this? Because this is the age of Big Data. This catchphrase seems academic, but it’s actually very simple. Big Data refers to a massive, complex amount of data, facts, and statistics—so large you can’t process it without some form of analytics or “logic screen.” Traditional software techniques usually can’t handle it. Thus, companies are investing billions to analyze all the data they can collect so they can learn about their customers’ preferences. Their goal is to market their products and services more effectively, increase profits, and ensure their future viability.

“More than 500 million photos are uploaded and shared every day, along with more than 200 hours of

video every minute” according to the White House report “Big Data: Seizing Opportunities, Preserving Values (see www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/big_data_privacy_report_may_1_2014.pdf). “But the volume of information that people create themselves... pales in comparison to the amount of digital information created *about* them each day.”

But the data collected in those giant data e-warehouses are only as good as the input. You’ve probably heard the saying, “Garbage in, garbage out.” For front-line nurses, the “Big Data” about our care and caring practices are only as good as what we document. The quality and quantity of our documentation are crucial for the patient in front of us, for trending that patient’s data to detect health variations, and for the future of health care overall as the data are studied in massive amounts.

So at the end of the day, nurses are driving much of our current and future healthcare quality strategy. But are the data what they *should* be? Are we thorough and accurate in what we’re documenting? Or are we just recording the minimum required because we’re flying so fast in this frenetic world that we’re just trying to get through this shift?

Step back and think about how much you use your smartphone, tablet, or computer. Think, too, about how much is being collected about you. Now think about what

data, and how much data, are being collected on your patients as your fingers strike the keyboard or write on the clipboard.

Remember—what you record has far-reaching consequences for your patients and for health care. So the next time you’re charting, just think: “I am data.”

Lilee Gelinas

Lilee Gelinas, MSN, RN, FAAN
Editor-in-Chief
lgelinas@healthcommedia.com

