

*Editorial***THE PRIME DIRECTIVE**

Angela Collins, RN, DSN, APRN-BC, CCNS  
Editorial Board Member

Skilled communication is one of the most elusive competencies to master. However, when the focus is patient safety, it is the prime directive for organizational excellence. The two documents that have been personally highly applicable in this author's clinical practice are the research reports called *Silence Kills* (Maxfield et al., 2004) and *Dialogue Heals* (Maxfield et al., 2008). The full reports are available as a pdf download at [www.silencekills.com](http://www.silencekills.com) if an email address is registered.

These reports focus on seven categories of conversations that are both challenging and perceived by most healthcare professionals as "risky". These categories represent the problems in communication that lead to poor patient outcomes (Maxfield, et.al. 2004).

- Broken Rules
- Mistakes
- Lack of Support
- Incompetence
- Poor teamwork
- Disrespect
- Micromanagement

Maxfield et al., (2004) call the inability to communicate in these circumstances as a choice not to have a crucial confrontation. Addressing these problems in rural healthcare environments can present with an additional level of complexity, due to the financial interconnectivity of only a small group of providers.

Confrontations in communication are paradoxical. Handled correctly there can be insights gained, relationships enriched, and problems solved. Incorrectly handled confrontations can lead to decrease productivity and job disengagement. The recommendations set forth in the report *Dialogue Heals* and the companion book *Crucial Confrontations* are to reflect on the essence of the problem, make it safe for the conversation to occur, and to consider scripting the intervention. This author uses the lens of these resources at a starting point for reflection. The suggestions are interventions to improve communication competency based on evidence. Recommended interventions include practice, choosing the best timing for a confrontation, words to use, and safe persons with whom to rehearse a confrontation. What is the issue that needs your deliberate decision to make rural healthcare safer for your community of concern? Use these resources to take that decision to communicate about an issue to a higher probability of success.

## REFERENCES

- Maxfield, Grenny, McMillan, Patterson, & Switzler. (2004). Silence kills. Retrieved on November 9, 2009, from <http://www.silencekills.com/>
- Maxfield, Grenny, McMillan, Patterson, & Switzler. (2008). Dialogue heals. Retrieved on November 9, 2009, from <http://www.silencekills.com/>