What if...seems to be the big question of the day! After I selected those words as a title for a presentation at a national conference, I found that the World Future Society chose that as its theme for its national meeting. The Houston Chronicle had huge sports headlines asking that question regarding the NFL draft. Van Phillips, the prosthetics inventor, attributes his inventiveness to answering three questions: why, what if, and how. Why probably best describes the “where we are now,” and how describes the process for getting to a new place, but the question of what if sparks the creativity many of us have embedded within us.

What if we used MOOCs (massive open online courses) instead of each of us developing similar (or maybe in some cases the same) learning opportunities? Can you imagine how our productivity could increase?

What if we validated that repetitive practice is more effective than once-a-year skills demonstrations? Oermann, Kardong-Edgren, Odom-Maryon, and Roberts (2014) have shown interesting effects related to cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

What if we consistently expected learners to demonstrate knowledge or application of something as a building block for newer content? Academic programs refer to this, in part, as the “flipped classroom.”

What if we had comprehensive interprofessional learning? How would we redesign what we do? How would we sustain our professional contribution in a way that maintained a valued part of the role without being focused on the issues of scope of the various roles?

What if we incorporated regular reflective periods so that learners did not just listen and take notes? What if they had this reflective time to synthesize “chunks” of information and create new ideas and strategies?

“What if...?” is a powerful question. Yet, it is insufficient in itself. Without a culture that supports considered risk-taking (Crenshaw & Yoder-Wise, 2013) to the degree that fear of failure is not fearsome at all, few will risk sharing ideas that do not fit within the current culture. At a time when change is so dynamic, any thwarting of ideas to do something different or better may limit an organization’s very survivability. What if we promoted being as inventive as possible?

Invention does not refer to products only, although the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation support the website and work of MakerNurse.org, whose primary goal is to facilitate our creativity. What designs have you considered but not enacted?

What if we shared new approaches to solving problems or to viewing health care systems? How many workarounds are really innovative solutions to a problem that is presented because of a policy or practice within an organization?

What if patients depended on us to make their world different? What if they already do? What if it were up to us to make a difference to improve health care?

REFERENCES