Leadership in Nursing—Current Perspectives

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As the profession makes big strides forward into the new millennium, the need for quality nursing leaders at all levels & in all areas of the profession is rising. Leaders are needed in hospitals, professional organizations, in community & in educational institutions.

The administrators of the educational institutions are the guiding force to create a healthy & vibrant academic environment & the administrators of health care agencies are the guiding force in creating a healthy professional work environment. Together their combined efforts will provide the leadership to shape the professional environment of today & the future.

Modern Styles of Leadership

Transformational leadership

Transactional leadership

Transformational leadership—Leader keeps himself away from the followers & there is hardly any interaction or understanding.

Transformational leadership includes four components:

- Idealized influence - It is a process whereby the leader provides the followers with a vision & a sense of mission & gains respect, trust & confidence from them.
- Inspirational - Inspirational leaders engage in confidence building of their subordinates thereby influencing their ability to perform their assignments & task successfully.
- Intellectual stimulation - Intellectual awareness is a process whereby the leader increases followers' awareness of problems & issues. It involves a participatory process.
- Individualized considerations - It includes providing support, encouragement & developmental experience for the individual members of team.

Transactional leadership

Transactional form of leadership behaviour is based on a contract with the worker by providing a reward for an agreed on effort or performance e.g. M.N.C. where targeted financial goals are given.

Desirable Characteristics of Leaders in Nursing

The leadership in nursing will be the product of a visionary view of health of the community. It is based on certain attitudes, skills, knowledge & attributes.

Attitudes should be formulated by

- A sensitivity to current social issues and commitment to the cause of social justice to reduce the health and socio-economic inequality.
- A true awareness of how health and development are inseparable.
- Awareness that assertiveness is a positive and desirable behavioral trait, & is not to be confused with aggressiveness.

Knowledge emerges from

- Recognized expertise and credibility in one or more areas of nursing.
- Extensive communication activities including networking both within & outside nursing & the health sector.
- Appreciation of principle & practice of management related to individual/group/team leadership & relationship.

Skills in

- Directing & helping others crystallize their perceptions of key social & health related issues, especially the issue of equality.
- Inspiring colleagues & others to make maximum efforts in a common cause. Using imagination & creativity to concentrate the intellec-
tual & physical energy of others, future generations of health workers.
* Communicating & articulating the potential of nursing to contribute to the achievement of positive health.

**Personal attributes, which attract, influence and evoke confidence from others, such as integrity, humour, imagination, creativity, risk taking, courage, humanism, inter-personal skills, and mentor and college relationship.

**Qualities of Nurse Leaders**

The nurse administrator, be it the nursing superintendent, supervisor or ward in charge, is in a unique position to lead the staff in her unit in the desired direction, which ultimately would help in achieving the goals of nursing department i.e. quality nursing care.

It is absolutely essential for the nursing administrators to possess the qualities of an effective leader, like:
* Good judgment
* Insight & vision
* Dynamic and Intelligence
* Ability to accept responsibility
* Effective communication skills
* A well balanced personality - socially & emotionally mature
* A caring human being
* A sense of humour

A good nursing administrator inspires staff to fulfill their personal & institutional goals and create an atmosphere where one would live & work in a dignified manner.

She should be a democratic but firm leader who invites opinion of others but uses her own judgment in taking important decision.

She is considered as a role model who must set an example by her own actions. She is an advocate for her staff as well as the patients. A nurse leader possesses these qualities by virtue of being a woman & a nurse, which she enriches during day-to-day experience in her work place.

**Suggestions for Improving Leadership in Nursing**

It is time to realize that fundamental changes are necessary in our attitude towards risk taking, assertiveness & difference in opinion. We need to create an environment that would at least tolerate diversity of behaviours, personality differences and so called troublemakers.

**Power at higher level:** Increased recognition of the role of nursing has usually come through appreciation of their significant contribution to make towards health.

Prepare nurses for collective bargaining: At present there are wide variations in the many nursing associations & organizations. Ability to negotiate & bargain is poorly developed.

Make the INC & the state nursing councils strong & autonomous bodies.

A definite number of nurses must be prepared as managers for top management level: There is no regular course in administration for head nurses & nursing superintendents.

**Leadership without authority does not get recognition:**

Nursing administrators must have the authority to reward as well to initiate punitive measures to subordinates according to need.

A nurse should have say in planning of nursing care: Nurses should get involved in planning care of patients. They should insist a change in doctor's orders when it is so needed in view of nursing diagnosis and thus contribute towards effective patient care.

**Team spirit among the nurses working in a unit has to be encouraged:** The nurses must enlighten each other with the jobs accomplished and the performances given. For this a team spirit is encouraged in sisters, staff and auxiliaries and student nurses by strict enforcing and highlighting of handing over and taking over. Such achievements must be conveyed to nursing officers at director level in fortnightly meetings.

**Nursing managers should be provided with adequate resources such as phone, computers in a well-maintained office, financial and clerical support since these are important symbols of position & leadership.**
Nursing education should match with nursing service provided in the institution/state: Due to lack of resources nursing practice suffers a lot & sub standard care is offered to clients. Hence it is the need of the hour to set up model units or wards in every institution, where a student can learn to provide high quality care.

The professional association has a major role in preparing nurses to be well informed in the following areas:
- Labour relations, collective bargaining, and public relations.
- Legal aspects of nursing.
- Ethics and nursing care standards.
- Improvement in interactive skills with doctors, patients, and administrators.
- Development of assertive - ness among nurses.
- Media awareness and use.
- Profiles of striking personalities in nursing field.

Healthy work atmosphere is conducive to good performance: Positive relationship should be promoted between different groups e.g. physicians & allied health professionals.

In order to have better co-ordination and obtain better professional output, nursing personnel must be under control of a nursing administrator - Nursing is moving towards professionalism and it must become a self-governing autonomous body.

**Tasks before Nursing Leaders**

Widen nursing horizons

Establish lines of communication with other professionals, other sectors, public, & policymakers.

Come out of closed professional boundaries of communication.

Interact with like-minded groups - women's groups and other professional groups.

Participate in and hold more inter-professional meetings & conferences.

Take up issues of current concern to women, children, public & workers.

**Enhance professional knowledge & skill**

- Take Clinical specialization from colleges to hospital and community.
- Engage in clinical and field based research rather than education related topics.
- Write widely on nursing & about nursing.
- Publish more journals, news-letters & books.

**Strive towards professional autonomy**

- Take & accept more responsibility in practice.
- Take up & encourage independent practice.
- Learn & practice accountability.
- Launch societies, interest groups & organizations in different fields of nursing.
- Form network of all nursing organizations.

Learn new skills
- Public speaking and assertiveness.
- Political influencing and advocacy for health.

- Negotiations and collective bargaining.
- Economics and financial management.
- Networking and linking.
- Writing and publication.

**Summary**

A leader who serves with vision, (plans for future needs and problem solving) has courage, (takes initiative and leads followers to positive results) and is reality oriented (realizes that the fundamental changes are necessary in our attitude towards risk taking, assertiveness and difference in opinion) is a great leader who has potential for extraordinary results.

**Bibliography**