

Creating Healthy Work Environments VIRTUAL 2021

“Leadership on Steroids” Inpatient Nurse Managers’ Experiences and Roles During COVID-19

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Purpose:

In Canada and around the world, the experiences of acute care nurses have been profiled in the media throughout the current COVID-19 pandemic. While senior leadership and point-of-care staff have been recognized, little is known about the experiences of first line nurse managers who have played a critical role in leading and supporting staff while also contributing to their organization’s strategic responses to the pandemic (Rosser et al. 2020). The purpose of this paper is to describe how 13 acute care nurse managers enacted and experienced transformational and complexity leadership during COVID-19. We present a case study of leadership at one large, Canadian multi-site academic health sciences centre where we sought to understand how the pandemic impacted the first line manager’s role, strategies that were used to navigate organizational and patient care challenges, supports that were available and overall key learnings about these leadership roles during a pandemic.

Methods: We present a case study of leadership at one large, Canadian multi-site academic health sciences centre where we sought to understand how the pandemic impacted the first line manager’s role, strategies that were used to navigate organizational and patient care challenges, supports that were available and overall key learnings about these leadership roles during a pandemic.

A series of conversations with four groups of inpatient nurse managers were held In July 2020 to gain an understanding of their leadership experiences during COVID-19. Participation was completely voluntary. The discussions were recorded with permission granted from the manager participants. Guided by transformational leadership (Avolio 2011; Fischer 2016) and complexity leadership theories (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007), content analysis was used to identify key themes within the transcripts (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

Results: Results reveal the intensity and dual roles of nurse managers during the COVID-19 crisis. Nurse managers in this academic health sciences centre safeguarded patients, families and staff while ensuring 24/7-unit operations. Managers supported a healthy work environment through maintaining leader-staff relationships, and continued to inspire staff to keep going despite the ongoing uncertainty and ambiguity. Nurse leaders in this case study exemplified characteristics of transformational and complexity leadership as their roles were intensified in the context of COVID-19. Results also include a description of nurse managers’ experiences related to: (a) role changes during COVID-19; (b) personal impact; (c) strategies to navigate organizational and patient care challenges; (d) supports and resources available; (e) key learnings about leadership during a pandemic; and (f) recommendations for practice and education in

healthcare organizations. Managers' recommendations for nursing and health care leaders regarding the ongoing and future pandemics are discussed. Findings may be helpful for senior and middle nursing leaders to support nurse managers in future pandemic or extended crisis situations. Nurse educators may also incorporate findings into undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education nursing programs in preparing future nurse leaders to work in increasingly complex health care systems.

Conclusion: Nurse managers play key leadership roles in supporting staff and patients during a pandemic. Their roles should not be overlooked as foundational to ensuring the delivery high quality and safe patient care.

Title:

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Keywords:

Nurse leaders, managers and transformational leaders

Abstract Summary:

This paper describes leadership at one Canadian academic health sciences centre where we sought to understand how the pandemic impacted nurse managers' roles, strategies that were used to navigate organizational and patient care challenges, supports that were available and overall key learnings about these leadership roles during a pandemic.

Late Breaking Reason:

This paper presents novel findings regarding the leadership experiences and roles of inpatient nurse managers during the COVID-19 pandemic. To date most studies report how COVID-19 has impacted front-line staff. This work highlights the key roles that managers play in leading "behind the scenes" to support their staff and patients.

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