Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow

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Back to school together

Nurse leaders support each other through graduate education

By Peraida Kasser Trickett, Janet Gilmore, Kathy Lynn and Ann Quinn

Challenges within the health care environment demand varied and continuous learning, particularly among formal leaders. Knowledge in health care, from the business to the clinical side, has exploded. The skill sets and knowledge many seasoned nurse leaders developed through formal education years ago no longer provide them with the global perspective or knowledge of issues and technology so essential to their continued success. It is not uncommon for an extremely talented person who stays in the same organization for more than 20 years to find his or her confidence beginning to erode without an influx of new learning and experience.

"Graduate school is important because it gives you the tools to evaluate your practice and the courage to implement needed changes," explains Kathy Lynn, RN, BSN, CNOR, a director with The Methodist Hospital.

Essential knowledge requirements for Nurse leaders in formal leadership positions are found at the graduate level. They include areas such as measuring productivity, best practices in recruitment and retention, building new performance management and compensation models, demand staffing, professional practice models, application and design of research to improve clinical quality, managing conflict, negotiation, principles of benchmarking, and performance improvement.

Increasing education of management

How do you quickly increase the graduate level of nurses in formal management positions without waiting 10 years? At The Methodist Hospital, Texas Medical Center, Houston, Texas, 15 nurses in formal leadership positions began master’s work in a “cohort” through a two-year accelerated program with the University of Texas School of Nursing in Houston. The students worked full time while attending the program. The program was funded by tuition reimbursement, personal contributions and Foundation funds. Classes were scheduled in large time blocks to allow students to be away from work in blocks versus short episodes.

Since most of the nurse leaders had not attended school for a dozen or more years, there were many fears entering the program. "I didn’t know how hard it would be to adjust to student life again or if I would..."
The tremendous changes that have marked nursing over the last half of the 20th century have brought significant challenges along with terrific opportunities. Cycles of boom and bust, as well as high unemployment and shortages of workers, have been common, and change has been the norm. These changes have created an environment in which individual nurses must take control of their careers and futures. Nurses' dependence on others to define their future for them is a phenomenon of the past.

Career planning, a continuous process of self-assessment and goal setting, helps nurses adapt to changes in their own development, in the profession and in the world in which they live and practice. The process is really about the development of a life skill, one that nurses can apply not only in their workplaces but in their personal lives as well. It is an individual responsibility, a life-long activity, and a necessary skill in a changing world of work and health care. When one engages in the process, a sense of enjoyment, pride and energy is also realized. Career development is an iterative and continuous rather than a linear process. It requires individuals to understand the environment in which they live and work, assess their strengths and limitations and validate that assessment, articulate their personal career vision, develop a plan for the future that is realistic for them, and then market themselves to achieve their career goals.

To assist nurses to take control of their careers and futures, we developed a five-phase career planning and development model.

Scanning your environment is about taking stock of the world in which you live. It involves understanding the current realities in the nursing and work environments as well as the future trends at the global, national and local levels in society and health care. Through the scanning process you become better informed, learn to see the world through differing perspectives and are able to answer the question “What are the current realities/future trends?” These trends will influence career opportunities.

Completing your self-assessment and reality check enables you to identify your values, experiences, knowledge, strengths and limitations and to marry those with your environmental scan to help you create your career vision and identify the directions to take as you plan your future. As you begin your self-assessment, you will first identify all the attributes that make you who you are and, then, what you have to offer to the environment. Completing your self-assessment and reality check will allow you to give honest and accurate answers to the two questions, “Who am I?” and “How do others see me?”

Creating your career vision answers the question, “What do I really want to be doing?” Without a vision of where you want to go, you will most likely simply react to events as they occur rather than choose a direction that helps you take advantage of an opportunity when it occurs. Your career vision is the link between who you are and what you can become.

Having a career vision is a powerful motivator for reaffirming your current situation or for making a change. Developing your strategic career plan is critical to taking control of your own career. Designing a plan is not something that someone else can do for you. You must do it for yourself to ensure that you are continually and satisfactorily progressing toward your personal career goals. By answering the question “How can I achieve my career goal?” you ensure that you have a plan that is both uniquely yours and easily converted into action.

Marketing yourself involves articulating your professional and personal qualities, attributes and expertise so that you can effectively communicate what you have to offer and why you are the best person for the service that needs to be delivered.

For nurses, “How can I best market myself?” is facilitated by establishing a network, acquiring a mentor, and developing written and verbal communication skills. Your strengths, coupled with a commitment and belief in yourself, make you your own best marketer.

Gail J. Donner, RN, PhD, and Mary M. Wheeler, RN, MEd, are partners in Donner & Wheeler, a consulting firm based in Canada that specializes in career planning and development within the health and human service sectors. Their services are offered both onsite and online. You may contact them at www.donner-wheeler.com. Donner and Wheeler have also been presenting “Achieving Your Lifelong Career” at the Sigma Theta Tau 2001 Professional Development Conference.

ONLINE JOB SEARCH PREMIERS

To assist nurses to take control of their careers and futures, we developed a five-phase career planning and development model.

Renew your membership today!

Reward your efforts show young people benefits of a nursing career

The nursing profession has never faced greater challenges. Shortages loom. Managed care is changing how and where we work. High pressure is leading to high turnover. Yet the world's population is aging and growing, and it needs nurses more than ever.

For nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow, 24 nursing and health care organizations across the United States are working together to ensure that a new generation of young people learns about the benefits of a nursing career. Soon we will be advertising nationwide and reaching out to youngsters who've never really given nursing a second thought.

Our organization is proud to support Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow:
To learn more you can help, contact Kathy Bennison at Sigma Theta Tau International; 888.634.7575 or visit www.nursingsociety.org. 2 EXCELLENCE IN NURSING ADMINISTRATION • April 2001

www.nursingsociety.org

Develop a professional strategic plan to achieve the career you have always wanted.

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When Bright Minds Come Together
Why you should attend Convention 2001

Beginning November 10, Sigma Theta Tau members from around the world will converge on Indianapolis to participate in the 36th Biennial Convention. "Learning and Leading Globally," the theme for the convention, will unite the variety of educational sessions, research presentations and panel discussions that span the four-day event. To learn why you should join more than 2,000 other "bright minds" at convention, read on.

More networking opportunities than you can count
Bringing members together—whether they are seasoned leaders or recent graduates—is one of the hallmarks of Sigma Theta Tau International conventions.

"Attending the receptions and visiting the lively exhibits hall are perfect opportunities to meet society leaders, get together with new friends and renew past acquaintances," says Nancy Dickenson-Hazard, RN, MSN, FAAN, chief executive officer of Sigma Theta Tau International. "We’re proud that the biennial convention provides such excellent opportunities for our members to network.

In recent years, many members attending convention have found insightful answers to their questions about careers, clinical specialties, research interests, and education, leadership and volunteer opportunities. Attendees have also been able to share the challenges they are facing as nurses and

as innovations in clinical practice and new technology that can be applied to nursing practice, education and health care.

"Employers value the educational opportunities our convention provides attendees," says Barbara Finke, RN, PhD, director of professional development services at Sigma Theta Tau. "Not only do nurse professionals discover some of nursing’s best practices from around the world, they earn continuing education credit, network with leaders in health care and return with new solutions for current challenges."

During the scientific sessions on Monday, November 12, "Global Leadership through Nursing Research" will be addressed in the educational sessions and in the keynote by Judith Shumian, RN, PhD, CHE, executive director of nursing policy for Health Canada. The latest research in aging and health, translational nursing, cancer and palliative care will be explored, as well as innovations in information technology, outcomes measurement and more in part of the "Rising Stars of Scholarship and Research" display, nursing students selected by their educational institutions will also be showcasing their research. Attendees are encouraged to start their day with the walk/run to benefit nursing research.

On the third day of the convention, leadership sessions focus on "Leading and Learning: Moving from I Can’t to I Can." Ronald Gross, author of Peak Learning, and Elizabeth Cohn, RN, NP, administrative director, of critical care services at North Shore University Hospital, will give the keynote address. Attendees will learn leadership and career strategies as well as new ways of envisioning for the future.

The House of Delegates convenes on the fourth day to address all business aspects of conventions. "Part of the role that chapters play is sending one or two members to the House of Delegates.

From the creative arts displays and poster presentations to the educational sessions and awards, nurses bring their enthusiasm for excellence to Sigma Theta Tau’s biennial convention.

Learning and Leading Globally
Members & Chapters

Have a recruitment or retention success story?
Call for Poster Presentations 2001 Biennial Convention, Indianapolis, Indiana Submission Deadline: May 31, 2001 (postmarked)

As part of the society’s 2001 convention, the International Public Relations committee would like to showcase best practices in the recruitment and retention of future and current nurses. All recruitment and retention level sessions and venues will be considered, including:

• Elementary and middle school children
• High school students
• Second-career individuals
• Health care organizations

For more information and submission requirements, visit www.nursingsociety.org, email poster@nursingsociety.org, or call Amy Macek or Kathy Bemison at 888.634.7575.

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Virtually ranking even with physicians, nurses topped the list in Gallup's annual Honesty and Ethics poll in 1999. Seventy-three percent of Americans rated nurses' honesty and ethics as either very high or high, four percent higher than pharmacists occupying the number two position. The 1999 poll was expanded to include 20 new occupations, including nurses. While other health care professionals were rated highly, including pharmacists (69 percent) and medical doctors (58 percent), nurses outranked them all in the public's view of their trustworthiness.

A 1999 Harris Poll commissioned by Sigma Theta Tau International and NurseWeek Publishing, Inc. also demonstrated the public's high level of trust in nurses. An overwhelming majority of Americans, 92 percent, said they trust information about health care provided by registered nurses; 93 percent said that they trusted health care information provided by physicians. Virtually ranking even with physicians, nurses scored higher in the public's trust than teachers or journalists. This vote of confidence may underpinning for marketing your nurses to the public.

"Nurses are seen as credible, honest and patient-focused," says Barbara Bronson Gray, RN, MN, managing editor with NurseWeek and chair of the Sigma Theta Tau International public relations committee. "This provides health care organizations a unique opportunity to bring health-related information to the public from a profession they trust."

Retaining experienced nurses becomes easier when their expertise is recognized.

What's new online

Access the Journal of Nursing Scholarship Online
Discover our directory of members inside the Member Community
Receive career advice from nurse professionals
Search all library resources in one place

Excellence articles are available at nursingsociety.org/publications/excellence.html. Don't miss these articles:

**Excellence in Nursing Administration:**
Basics of school nursing
Connect media with your front-line experts
Online job search primer

**Excellence in Clinical Practice:**
Is a master's degree in your future?
Online job search primer
A new search for the people

**Excellence in Nursing Education:**
Students learn through service to others
Members respond to grade inflation

Retaining experienced nurses becomes easier when their expertise is recognized.

The decision to use a physician or a nurse is usually very logical. Sometimes, however, reporters will want only one source of information. The decision to use a physician of nurse as a spokesperson will depend largely on the subject matter, and the choice is usually very logical. If the subject has to do with diagnosis or a procedure typically handled by a physician, a physician should be used. For example, in a story about the best type of artificial hip to use in joint replacement surgery, an orthopedic surgeon is the best choice. Scenarios for choosing a nurse instead of a doctor include stories that contain patient education, prevention, wellness and other practical health care information, along with nursing issues such as staffing, recruitment and nursing education.

"Nurses are especially useful in explaining the value of hospital programs, how to access and work with health care facilities, practical tips on symptom management and chronic care, the psychological implications of disease, and how to actively participate in disease prevention and screening," adds Gray.

**Front-line communication**

With more than 2 million nurses in the United States, they currently outnumber physicians four to one. When the media contacts you, nurses significantly add to the pool of experts at your organization. The potential for accurate, clear communications can be dramatically increased.

In addition to physician spokespersons, nurses provide the unique perspective of a health care professional who gives direct patient care. Media training sessions may be helpful for nurses who would like the opportunity to share their knowledge with the public. Many nurses work on the front-line and that they effectively interpret technical terminology and teach patients their own personal medical relay.

"Reinforcing nurses' participation in the media strengthens the high level of trust that exists in nurses, enhances the nurses' visibility in the delivery of health care and demonstrates how an organization's nurses accomplish care plans," Gorzelany continues. "Sharing our experience with the public through the media helps us reach an even broader audience and improve the health of people in our community."

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Audrey Wise, MBA, is marketing director for Bridgeport Hospital, Bridgeport, Conn.