Title:
Leadership Education for Staff Nurses: Shortcomings, Barriers, and Future Directions

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Abstract Summary:
Current research indicates the need for improved education and training for staff nurse team leaders and charge nurses. Existing knowledge, barriers, and curriculum recommendations will be discussed as they relate to staff nurse leadership and the six core competencies of the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) Institute.
Learning Activity:

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE
The learner will be able to summarize the existing literature on staff nurse leader education.	• Research clearly demonstrates that effective nursing leadership is instrumental in improving staff retention, safety, and patient outcomes; however, few educational resources for staff nurse leaders exist. • Staff nurses can be appointed to, apply for, and volunteer for leadership positions that may be formal or informal. Occasionally, staff nurses may end up in a leadership position by default. • Staff nurses often have insufficient training and

	preparation to succeed in their leadership roles, despite receiving some leadership education in their degree programs prior to licensure. • Communication is the most commonly cited learning need for staff nurse leaders, including conflict management and how to motivate and empower staff. Other commonly identified needs include leadership theory, transformational leadership concepts, ethics, budgeting, legal issues, stress management, organizational skills, prioritizing, delegating, and more.
The learner will be able to relate the six core competencies of the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) Institute to staff nurse leader educational needs.	• The six core competencies of the QSEN Institute will be reviewed: patient-centered care, teamwork and collaboration, evidence-based practice, quality improvement, safety, and informatics. • Each core competency will be related to a staff nurse leader educational need identified in the literature. For example, staff nurse leader requests for education on budgeting, ethics, and legal issues are relevant to the quality improvement and safety competencies.
The learner will be able to identify benefits of and barriers to staff nurse leader education.	Benefits: o Well prepared staff nurse leaders can make positive transformations on the unit and improve patient outcomes. o Competent staff nurse leaders report an increased sense of purpose, responsibility, empowerment, confidence, and job satisfaction. o Continued education allows staff nurses to use their charge nurse or team leader role as a stepping stone to upper-level management and administration. Barriers: o Nurses identified lack of training and education as the most common barrier to pursuing a staff nurse leader role. o Poorly trained staff nurse leaders report decreased job satisfaction, lower self-confidence, increased stress, and a higher rate of burnout. o Lack of time and lack of resources were cited as barriers to improved staff nurse leader education. o Nurses reported increased workload and responsibility without appropriate financial compensation, authority, and autonomy were major barriers to pursuing a staff nurse leader role.

The learner will be able to prioritize specific educational needs of staff nurse leaders and potential staff nurse leaders.	• Communication is the greatest educational need for staff nurse leaders. This includes education on communicating effectively with patients, families, staff, administrators, physicians, and other members of the interdisciplinary team. Communication also includes conflict management, engaging and motivating team members, and creating a sense of community on the unit. • Organizational skills were the second most-commonly identified educational needs for staff nurse leaders, including budgeting, multitasking, prioritizing, delegation, and goal-setting. • Other educational topics include ethical and legal issues, work-life balance, stress management, self-reflection and self-awareness, and stress management. • Staff nurse leaders should prioritize based on their self-identified areas of weakness and unit needs.
The learner will be able to begin planning a curriculum for staff nurse leader education.	• Effective curricula for staff nurse leader education should include the topics of need mentioned above. • The most commonly preferred methods of education delivery are self-paced online educational modules and webinars. A few nurses still prefer face-to-face classroom sessions. • Case studies and simulated scenarios with group discussion and debriefing were identified as effective methods of learning. • Mentoring is an essential component in the preparation of an effective staff nurse leader.

Abstract Text:

Background

Of the roughly three million licensed registered nurses (RNs) living in the United States (U.S.), about two-thirds are employed as staff nurses, which are defined as front-line RNs who spend the majority of their work day providing direct patient care in the clinical setting. The majority of staff nurses in the U.S. hold diploma, associate, or baccalaureate degrees in nursing (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). Although some of these degree programs incorporate leadership education into their curricula, the majority of formal leadership training takes place in graduate and advanced nursing degree programs (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2015). Staff nurses cite this lack of formal training and education as the greatest barrier to pursuing leadership opportunities on their units, including charge nurse, team leader, and committee chair roles (Gerrish, Ashworth, Lacey, & Bailey, 2008; Wojciechowski, Ritze-Cullen, & Tyrrell, 2011; Dearmon, Riley, Mestas, & Buckner, 2015). Few resources for staff nurse leadership education exist. This is concerning because existing literature demonstrates that

effective nursing leadership is instrumental in improving staff retention, safety, and patient outcomes (Wojciechowski et al., 2011; Mendes & Fradique, 2014; Dierckx de Casterle, Willemse, Verschueren, & Milis; Abraham, 2011).

Purpose

The purpose of this review was to explore the existing literature on staff nurse leadership and staff nurse leadership education to identify benefits, barriers, and knowledge gaps related to these topics, as well as to make evidence-based recommendations for a curriculum that is designed to prepare staff nurses to assume and maintain leadership roles.

Method

A broad literature search was conducted using the PubMed and CINAHL databases. Keyword searches used the terms *nurse leadership, staff nurse leader*, *charge nurse role, staff nurse leader education,* and *nursing leadership education.* Articles were excluded if they focused on high-level management positions in nursing and nursing leadership positions requiring advanced degrees, as this was not the focus of this review. A total of 18 articles were considered for the purpose of this review. The Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) Institute has defined six core competencies to aid in curricular development for continuing education programs: *patient-centered care, teamwork and collaboration, evidence-based practice, quality improvement, safety,* and *informatics* (Cronenwett et al., 2007). The findings from this literature review are related to these six core competencies.

Findings

Well prepared and competent staff nurse leaders can make positive transformations on the unit and improve patient outcomes. They report an increased sense of purpose, responsibility, empowerment, confidence, and job satisfaction. By contrast, poorly trained staff nurse leaders report decreased job satisfaction, lower self-confidence, increased stress, and a higher rate of burnout. Lack of time and lack of resources were cited as barriers to improved staff nurse leader education, and nurses identified lack of training and education as the most common barrier to pursuing a staff nurse leader role. Additionally, nurses reported increased workload and responsibility without appropriate financial compensation, authority, and autonomy were major barriers to pursuing a staff nurse leader role.

Communication is the greatest educational need for staff nurse leaders. This includes training on communicating effectively with patients, families, staff, administrators, physicians, and other members of the interdisciplinary team. Communication also includes conflict management, engaging and motivating team members, and creating a sense of community on the unit. Organizational skills were the second most-commonly identified educational needs for staff nurse leaders, including budgeting, multitasking, prioritizing, delegation, and goal-setting. Other educational needs included ethical and legal issues, work-life balance, stress management, self-reflection and self-awareness, and stress management.

Significance and Implications for Nursing

There is a need for improved leadership education targeted directly at staff nurses. Effective curricula for staff nurse leader education should include the topics of need identified in the literature, which dovetail with the six core competencies of the QSEN institute. Staff nurse leaders should prioritize educational pursuits based on their self-identified areas of weakness and unit needs. The most commonly preferred methods of education delivery among staff nurses are self-paced online educational modules and webinars; however, some nurses still prefer face-to-face classroom sessions (Abraham, 2011; George, 2002; Wojciechowski et al., 2011). Case studies and simulated scenarios with group discussion and debriefing were identified as effective methods of learning in the literature and should be incorporated into course delivery (Abraham, 2011; Krugman & Smith, 2003; Pollard & Wild, 2014). Continuing leadership education allows staff nurses to use their charge nurse or team leader role as a stepping stone to upper-

level management and administration and can be the impetus for a staff nurse to embark on a career as a regional, national, and international nurse leader.