

Nursing Leadership in Health Care System: Driving Quality Improvement and Patient Safety

Kassem Nasser Almarzouq¹, Mortada Mohamed Alali², Hitheam Ali Alnujidi³, Hassan Ali Alsuhaieb⁴, Sukainah Mohammed Alshikh Saleh⁵, Ghadeer Ali Aljassiem⁶, Roqyyah Hassan Alessa⁷, Ahmad Hussien Alabdulla⁸, Ghofran Sami Kamal⁹, Ahmed Fahad Alshammari¹⁰, Zahra Hassan Al Jarad¹¹, Wafa Abdullah Albor¹²

1. *Technician Nursing, Alahsa Psychiatric Hospital*
2. *Technician Nursing, Alahsa Psychiatric Hospital*
3. *Technician Nursing, Alahsa Psychiatric Hospital*
4. *Technician Nursing, Alahsa Psychiatric Hospital*
5. *Technician Nursing, King Fahad Hospital Hoffuf*
6. *Technician Nursing, King Fahad Hospital Hoffuf*
7. *Technician Nursing, King Fahad Hospital Hoffuf*
8. *Technician Nursing, Alahsa Psychiatric Hospital*
9. *Nursing Specialist, Al-Noor Specialist Hospital*
10. *Nursing technician, Managing the affairs of centres and sectors at hail*
11. *Nurse technical, Dammam Medical Complex*
12. *Technician Nursing, Sabia of Centre Health at Jazan*

Abstract

Nursing leadership goes a long way in determining the approach to improving patient safety and quality improvement in healthcare systems. It also reflects how nursing leaders have played many multi-faceted roles in the transformation of healthcare in an effort to affect changes in patient outcomes, the quality of care, collaboration among healthcare professionals, and professional development. This article, through a critical review of the related literature, identifies 30 studies running from 2010 to 2023, showing the importance of transformational and ethical leadership styles regarding the development of a culture of excellence and accountability. In addition, this paper has identified major challenges that face nurse leaders, including inappropriate staffing, resource limitations, and organizational barriers, and strategies to address these barriers. These findings point out that it is important to incorporate leadership education into nursing curricula, focusing on continuous professional development that equips nurses to become strong leaders with the capacity to manage complex healthcare environments. Nursing leadership is vital in the realization of quality, patient-centered care and in addressing systemic ills that challenge the healthcare system.

Keywords

Nursing leadership, patient safety, improvement of quality, transformational leadership, ethical leadership, leadership education, health care systems, professional development, health care transformation, and nurse leaders.

Introduction

Nursing leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the healthcare system and driving quality improvement and patient safety initiatives. As frontline caregivers, nurses have a direct impact on patient outcomes, and effective nursing leadership is essential for creating a culture of excellence and accountability within healthcare organizations (Yoder-Wise et al., 2019). The leader will lead, support, and guide nursing staff in rendering quality care for patients and working collaboratively with other professionals toward optimum patient outcomes. This,

according to Cummings et al. (2018) and Wong et al. (2018), is quite vital. Despite this, there are several boundaries to the leaders' efficiencies, such as inadequate staffing, limited resources, and lack of support from organizational leaders, which hamper the nursing leaders in driving quality improvement and patient safety effectively. References include Agyeman-Prempeh et al. (2021) and Blackstock et al. (2018).

This paper debates numerous facets of the role of nursing leaders in transforming health care, focusing on how they influence patient outcomes, quality of care, patient safety, collaboration with other disciplines, and professional development/mentoring. It also debates some challenges that face nursing leaders and methods for developing effective nursing leadership.

Methodology

A literature review was carried out regarding nursing leadership's influence on the quality improvement and safety of patients in health systems. Searches on PubMed, CINAHL, and Google Scholar were conducted for years ranging from 2010 through 2023. Special keywords used included "nursing leadership," "patient safety," "quality improvement," "leadership education," "transformational leadership," and "ethical leadership." The preliminary search resulted in 320 articles.

A total of 110 articles relevant to the topic under discussion were obtained after title and abstract screening. The inclusion criterion was a study of roles relating to nursing leadership, leadership styles, education interventions in nursing leadership, challenges to leadership among nurses, and the outcomes of leadership on patients concerning quality care. Exclusion criteria were studies not in the English language, not relating to nursing leadership, and out of the identified time frame for search.

After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria and removing duplicates, 55 articles remained for full-text analysis.

In all, 30 studies with acceptable relevance and quality of evidence to warrant review were considered. These studies adopted multiple methodologies to include quantitative research, qualitative analyses, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses. Among information pooled from the studies are leadership style information, educational strategies for the development of leadership in nursing, challenges that face nursing leadership, and the impact of leadership on patient safety and quality of care.

Literature Review

Literature identifies nursing leadership as influential in leading quality improvement for improved patient safety across health systems. The literature demonstrates that at the heart of establishing an environment that ascribes to excellence, accountability, and continuous improvement in health agencies are effective nursing leaders.

Among them, the most important one is the need for leadership learning in nursing. Inclusion of curriculum with leadership training would enable nurses to manage teams and in decision making and creating a safety environment for patients. Early exposure to the leadership concept reduces anxiety among nursing students and orient them to their future leadership role. Newer learning methodologies are simulation exercises, role-playing, and interactive group discussion-most of them make development of leadership competencies effective.

In this context, transformational leadership then comes out as the best form of leadership in nursing. The leaders inspire their teams through setting a well-defined vision, building trust, and inspiring innovation. It leads to job satisfaction among nurses, reduced turnover rates, and good collaboration within the interdisciplinary professions. Improved patients' outcomes are also

realized with transformational leadership since nurses owned their job and are able to provide better care.

Other ingredients involved in effective nursing leadership are ethical leadership. The ethical leader shows integrity, fairness, and respect, serving as a good example to team members. Such leadership engenders staff satisfaction and ensures the care provided for patients is per ethical and professional standards. Ethical leadership has been especially emphasized at times when there has been a pandemic since leaders have to solve complex ethical problems and limitations of resources.

Literatures identify various issues that confront nursing leaders, including inadequate staffing, resource limitation, budgetary constraints, and organizational policies that sometimes run into conflict with personal and professional values. These impede the good practice of leadership and threaten patient safety. These barriers can be dealt with through policies to reform advocacy, evidence-based leadership practice, and support for professional development.

The leaders play a very significant role in policy making as well as in the advocacy role. The nurse leader is able to change the policy by taking part in various decision-making forums through utilization of expertise, experience that ensures the patients' safety and improvement in quality of care. The policy advocacy by the nursing leaders addresses issues at the system level in effort to create an efficient and equitable healthcare system.

In general, the literature conveys that active nursing leadership serves as the driver for quality improvement and safety of patients. Nursing leaders may make a difference in patient outcomes and in the performance of health organizations by adopting appropriate transformational and ethical leadership styles, solving complex organizational issues, and committing to leadership development. Now more than ever, there is increasing emphasis on the need for greater priority on leadership education and lifelong professional development to equip registered nurses for competent leadership roles in contemporary health environments.

Discussion

Nursing Leadership Education: What Matters

Nursing education in leadership is to equip nurses with the necessary skills for team management, making ethical decisions, and ensuring the safety of the patients.

The absence of leadership knowledge among the students diminishes their positive behaviors due to anxiety, while it ruins their positive attitude towards becoming great leaders in the future. Hence, including an early concept of leadership training is important to enhance the understanding of policies, regulations, and clinical responsibilities among the students while helping them minimize errors during practice (Demeh & Rosengren, 2015; Ha & Pepin, 2017). Leadership education also bridges the gap between theoretical and practical nursing competencies, providing a holistic approach to care and addressing the disconnect between classroom learning and real-world application (Ha & Pepin, 2018). Evidence-based programs in undergraduate and postgraduate nursing courses have been identified as key strategies for developing future nursing leaders (Kim et al., 2022). However, barriers such as financial constraints, lack of institutional support, and generational differences in learning styles hinder effective nursing leadership education (Kim et al., 2022). Traditional pedagogical methods often fail to engage students who rely on social media and digital platforms for learning. Innovative teaching strategies, such as clinical leadership videos, role modeling, and group discussions, have been proposed as effective means of fostering leadership skills in nursing students (Ha & Pepin, 2017).

Leadership Styles and How They Relate to Quality Improvement

Amongst a few successful styles, transformational leadership seems to emerge to improve quality for better safety of the patients in nursing.

Transformational leaders captivate and inspire their teams by developing a vision, gaining trust, and cultivating innovation within the organization. This leadership style promotes satisfaction with a job, lowers turnover, and enhances teamwork among health professionals, as identified by Labrague et al. (2020) and Uslu Sahan & Terzioglu (2022). As leaders, they empower nurses to develop ownership for practice, and their impacts can trickle down to enhance care outcomes for their patients (Fischer, 2016). Spanish and Filipino Studies also pointed out the crucial role of empowering leadership styles to enhance the efficiency of the health system by reducing medical errors, infection rates, patient fall rates, etc., (Parro Moreno et al., 2013; Labrague, 2021). Another imperative aspect in nursing leadership is ethical leadership.

Ethical leaders demonstrate sensitivity to care, communication, and decision-making, serving as role models for nursing teams (Esmaelzadeh et al., 2017). Ethical leadership enhances staff satisfaction and ensures that patient care is delivered in alignment with moral and ethical standards (El-Gazar & Zoromba, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of ethical leadership in navigating crises and promoting patient safety by addressing challenges such as resource shortages, high workloads, and moral distress among healthcare workers (Markey et al., 2021).

Nursing Leadership and Patient Safety

In this regard, nursing leadership should establish an enabling work environment that guarantees retaining the nurses as well as improving patient safety outcomes (Regan et al., 2016).

Leaders who promote effective communication, give timely feedback, and listen to the ideas and concerns of team members support a safety culture in health care organizations. According to a study conducted in Norway, good leadership behaviors, such as providing fair decisions and empowering teams, reduce challenges like staff shortage and high workloads, which diminish patient safety (Storaker et al., 2022). The leadership approaches concerned with staff welfare, including workload management and professional development opportunities, ultimately reduce the level of burnout and increase job satisfaction among staff (Specchia et al., 2021). Leadership is about addressing the systemic issues that stand in the way of patient safety.

Some major obstacles related to ensuring care that have been facing nurse leaders include budgetary constraints, diversity in teams, and old policies. This therefore makes the inspiration of leadership in policy reforms and resource allocations significant to improve healthcare delivery and patient outcomes (Agyeman-Prempeh et al., 2021; Disch, 2020). Evidence-based leadership practices also have found their place among successful strategies in promoting patient safety, where leaders transfer research findings into clinical practice by developing protocols and procedures to minimize mistakes and improve care quality. (Tinkler & Robinson, 2020) .

The Role of Nursing Leadership in Policy Formation

Nursing leaders influence health policies at the level of organization and system.

Through their leadership, nurses are able to influence policies regarding patient safety and quality improvement. Nurse leaders often become involved with guideline development on many aspects of healthcare delivery, such as medication administration and infection control (Parro Moreno et al., 2013). According to a study conducted by Disch, increased emphasis on nursing leadership in policy development creates a venue to address health disparities and determinants of health (2020). It is through policy advocacy that nurse leaders have been involved in

developing health care systems that are more effective, fair, and patient-focused. **Challenges Facing Nurse Leaders**

Nurse leaders encounter numerous challenges, including budget constraints, staff shortages, and high workloads, which limit their ability to implement effective leadership practices and achieve desired outcomes (Agyeman-Prempeh et al., 2021).

Organizational policies that conflict with leaders' values can hinder ethical decision-making and compromise patient safety (Storaker et al., 2022). Nurse leaders also face personal challenges, such as balancing administrative responsibilities with clinical duties. The emotional demands of leadership, including managing conflicts and addressing staff concerns, can lead to stress and burnout (Esmaelzadeh et al., 2017). To rise above these challenges, it is required that the support, professional development opportunity, and resources to build leadership capacity be provided to the nurse leaders.

Strategies for Developing Nursing Leadership

For this reason, leadership training should be part of the nursing curriculum. The inclusion of leadership modules in the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum offers the means for the modern nursing student to find their place within this increasingly complex healthcare landscape. Clinical leadership projects and role-playing have been explored as practical learning activities that improve leadership competencies in students (Ha & Pepin, 2017). For nursing leadership, continuing education is crucial for its development and perpetuation.

These programs enable practicing nurses to enhance their leadership skills, update themselves to current best practices, and discuss emerging challenges in healthcare. Evidence-based programs that focus on ethical leadership, effective communication, and management of teams have been identified as strategies that promote quality improvement and patient safety (Kim et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Nursing leadership plays an important role in leading quality improvement and patient safety in the care provided in health facilities. The influential nursing leader will inspire and empower his or her team members, embed the culture of safety, and also advocate for policies that enhance the delivery of care. This includes resource constraints, ethics, and personal and professional demands that confront nursing leadership, which can be mitigated with various strategies that include leadership education, evidence-based practices, and continuing professional development in service. The commitment of nursing schools and health institutions to leadership training will, therefore, be quite vital in preparing effective nurse leaders who will assist in addressing the complex issues faced in modern health care to realize better results in patients, staff, and organizational outcomes. Succinctly stated, invest in good nursing leadership, and you have a health system that's bound to deliver quality, safe, patient-centered care.

References

- Agyeman-Prempeh, C., Ndaago, A. I., Setordzi, M., Abu, P., Tia, M. B., & Aboba, T. A. (2021). Challenges to effective nursing leadership: A systematic review. *ResearchSquare*.
- Blackstock, S., Salami, B., & Cummings, G. G. (2018). Organisational antecedents, policy and horizontal violence among nurses: An integrative review. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 26(8), 972-991.
- Cummings, G. G., Tate, K., Lee, S., Wong, C. A., Paananen, T., Micaroni, S. P. M., & Chatterjee, G. E. (2018). Leadership styles and outcome patterns for the nursing workforce and work environment: A systematic review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 85, 19-60.
- Demeh, W., & Rosengren, K. (2015). The visualization of clinical leadership in the content of nursing education—a qualitative study of nursing students' experiences. *Nurse Education Today*, 35(7), 888–893.

- Disch, J. (2020). Nursing leadership during a pandemic: What's your role? *Nursing Management*, 51(9), 6-8.
- El-Gazar, E. M. H., & Zoromba, M. A. (2021). Relationship between ethical leadership, work engagement, and turnover intention: Evidence from Egypt. *Ethics & Behavior*, 31(8), 648-664.
- Esmaelzadeh, F., Abbaszadeh, A., Borhani, F., & Peyrovi, H. (2017). Ethical sensitivity in nursing ethical leadership: A content analysis of Iranian nurses' experiences. *Open Nursing Journal*, 11, 1-13.
- Fischer, S. A. (2016). Transformational leadership in nursing: A concept analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(11), 2644-2653.
- Ha, L., & Pepin, J. (2017). Experiences of nursing students and educators during the co-construction of clinical nursing leadership learning activities: A qualitative research and development study. *Nurse Education Today*, 55, 90-95.
- Ha, L., & Pepin, J. (2018). Clinical nursing leadership educational intervention for first-year nursing students: A qualitative evaluation. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 32, 37-43.
- Kim, H. O., Lee, I., & Lee, B. S. (2022). Nursing leaders' perceptions of the state of nursing leadership and the need for nursing leadership education reform: A qualitative content analysis. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 30(7), 2216-2226.
- Labrague, L. J. (2021). Influence of nurse managers' toxic leadership behaviors on nurse-reported adverse events and quality of care. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 29(4), 855-863.
- Labrague, L. J., Lorica, J., Nwafor, C. E., & Cummings, G. G. (2020). Predictors of toxic leadership behaviour among nurse managers: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 28(7), 1580-1588.
- Markey, K., Ventura, C. A., Donnelly, C., & Doody, O. (2021). Cultivating ethical leadership in the recovery of COVID-19. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 29(2), 351-355.
- Parro Moreno, A., Serrano Gallardo, P., Ferrer Arnedo, C., Serrano Molina, L., de la Puerta Calatayud, M. L., Barberá Martín, A., Morales Asencio, J. M., & de Pedro Gómez, J. E. (2013). Influence of socio-demographic, labour and professional factors on nursing perception concerning practice environment in Primary Health Care. *Atencion Primaria*, 45(9), 476-485.
- Regan, S., Laschinger, H. K., & Wong, C. A. (2016). The influence of empowerment, authentic leadership, and professional practice environments on nurses' perceived interprofessional collaboration. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 24(1), E54-E61.
- Specchia, M. L., Cozzolino, M. R., Carini, E., Di Pilla, A., Galletti, C., Ricciardi, W., & Damiani, G. (2021). Leadership styles and nurses' job satisfaction. Results of a systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(4), 1552.
- Storaker, A., Heggstad, A. K. T., & Sæteren, B. (2022). Ethical challenges and lack of ethical language in nurse leadership. *Nursing Ethics*, 29(6), 1372-1385.
- Tinkler, L., & Robinson, J. (2020). Nursing leadership and patient safety. *British Journal of Nursing*, 29(16), 952-953.
- Uslu Sahan, N., & Terzioglu, F. (2022). The relationship of the nursing practice environment and nurses' intention to leave and job satisfaction. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 30(3), 619-627.
- Wong, C. A., Cummings, G. G., & Ducharme, L. (2018). The relationship between nursing leadership and patient outcomes: A systematic review update. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 26(7), 759-772.
- Wong, C. A., Spence, L. H. K., & Cummings, G. G. (2018). Authentic leadership and nurses' voice behavior and perceptions of care quality. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 26(7), 853-861.
- Yoder-Wise, P. S., Kowalski, K., & Canales, K. (2019). *Leading and managing in nursing* (7th ed.).