

TRANSITION TO THE PROFESSIONAL NURSE ROLE

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completion of this chapter, the reader will be able to

- Discuss the benefit of studying leadership.
- Identify the strengths of the associate's degree nurse.
- Identify the leadership expectations of the professional nurse in leading others.
- Assess his or her own current leadership abilities and roles.

Leaders have influence and inspire desired outcomes. As a nurse in direct patient care, you are a leader! You may not see yourself as one, but hopefully by the end of this book you will see the valuable role you play. You have significant influence within the interdisciplinary team, over patient safety issues, over care decisions, and on patient satisfaction (Duffy & Smith, 2013). Your leadership will help influence desired patient outcomes as well as organizational outcomes.

In this chapter, we discuss why it is important for nurses to learn about leadership. We review the strengths of the associate's degree nurse and how you can build upon that as you evolve in your professional development. Finally, we discuss leadership expectations and differentiate leadership skills from management skills.

In the case scenario (Box 1.1), Mary is an example of a nurse leader who is influencing change, guiding practice development, and assuming accountability for improving standards of care while containing costs (Taylor & Martindale, 2013). Mary is trying to enhance the quality of care while keeping her patient, Mrs. Smith, at the center of care. She is trying to work strategically and with a vision for better practice across the healthcare team. In addition, Mary has established her credibility by continuing her education

BOX 1.1 CASE SCENARIO

As you read the following case scenario, ask yourself:

- Can staff nurses (like Mary in this case scenario) be considered leaders? Do you need to be in an appointed position of power and authority (i.e., nurse manager or nurse administrator) to be considered a leader?
- If you consider Mary to be a leader, what evidence supports your decision?

Mary has an associate's degree and recently returned to school to obtain a baccalaureate degree in nursing. She is a staff nurse who has worked for the past 7 years on the medical–surgical unit of a 350-bed community hospital. Mary was recently awarded the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) Medical–Surgical Nursing board certification. The past few days, Mary took care of Mrs. Smith who was admitted with pneumonia. When Mary was tending to another patient, Mrs. Smith fell while going to the bathroom and broke her hip. Mary was devastated to learn that her patient experienced harm while on her watch. Mary wondered if she had been there earlier to offer toileting perhaps this would not have happened. Mary decided to complete a literature search on preventing patient falls. She learned that the evidence suggests hourly rounds may help reduce the incidents of falls in her unit. Mary talked with her peers who said they are also concerned about the recent rise in the number of falls and think that it might be a great initiative to start on the floor. Mary decided to approach her manager with this idea.

and obtaining her certification in her specialty. She has found evidence in the literature to support her action plan. As registered nurses like Mary, we need to display appropriate leadership and communication skills because we work within interprofessional teams in various healthcare settings. We need to inspire others to achieve desired outcomes for our patients, families, and communities.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE READING ON

Identify an effective leader in your organization. What is it about this person that makes an impression on you? What makes him or her successful in leading others? What appointed position or role does the person hold? Do you consider yourself to be a leader in your professional role at work? Explain.

When envisioning a leader, you might think of a visionary chief nursing officer at your organization. The chief nursing officer is a leader as he or she holds an appointed position of power and influence. However, leadership

is not just about the position someone holds. Leadership is a process and relationship among individuals. Frontline nurses providing and coordinating direct patient care are also valuable leaders. Nurses lead in the many different roles they perform. Nurses lead as they integrate the plan of care in collaboration with patients and their families. In the acute care setting, nurses lead by functioning as charge nurses who coordinate the unit activities during a shift. During any given shift, nurses lead by managing patient flow, assigning human resources (nurses and nursing assistants) to match patient needs, and providing effective hand-off communication with the next leader (Feldman, 2012, p. 224).

WHY STUDY LEADERSHIP?

Nurses study leadership to prepare themselves for the essential expectations of the professional nurse. Leadership competencies are viewed as a fundamental human activity and a critical component of nursing (Glazer & Fitzpatrick, 2013). Nursing roles have expanded making leadership skills more important than ever. Leadership skills are needed because nurses work in intraprofessional teams to solve urgent issues at the individual (micro) level, and also at the greater systems (macro) level (Morton & Hyrkas, 2012).

Many nurses enter the profession given their desire to make a positive difference in the world. Leadership competencies help nurses make that difference because leadership skills are needed to facilitate and implement beneficial change. Nurses make a positive difference with patients because they lead the interdisciplinary team to help improve patient outcomes. Nursing leadership skills and abilities have been linked to many improved outcomes such as quality patient care, healthy workplaces, job satisfaction, and driving cultural change (Mannix, Wilkes, & Daly, 2013). Leadership skills enable nurses to become trailblazers among their colleagues because they help to lead change and inspire others within the organization.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING A LEADER?

There are many benefits of being a leader. Some of the benefits impact the nurse personally. For example, nurse leaders working in direct patient care have reported improved job and personal satisfaction as well as increased opportunity for career advancement (Grindel, 2016). Nurse leaders who mentor others report the personal benefit of feeling a sense of pride and accomplishment. Other benefits of nurse leaders are related to patients and the organization. For example, nurse leaders benefit patients by improving patient care, safety, outcomes, and satisfaction (Grindel, 2016). In addition, effective nursing leaders benefit the organization by enhancing work processes, decreasing errors, and reducing waste, all of which help to support a healthy work environment (Downey, Parslow, & Smart, 2011; George et al., 2002).

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

There is no one universally accepted definition of “leadership.” In fact, leadership may mean different things in different situations. Although definitions may differ, the overall sentiments are frequently similar. Leadership can be defined as the process by which one influences others to follow one’s direction or to accomplish a goal (Huber, 2014; Mannix, Wilkes, & Daly, 2013). Leaders typically demonstrate integrity and have developed core values and a vision that inspires people.

Inherent in the definition of leadership is the notion that a leader has followers. Those followers are inspired to accomplish a goal. In the health-care setting, those goals often revolve around improving care and achieving positive patient outcomes (Taylor & Martindale, 2013). Leaders help their followers feel empowered to solve problems and to be innovative and creative. Leaders provide the direction and use their management abilities to assist people in the proper path.

Leadership is not about authority or power, nor is it about the individual’s position or title. Rather, leadership is derived from social influence. Leadership requires the assistance of other people who help you reach goals. Leadership is a learned skill achieved through developing a high level of self-awareness. Leaders can expand their knowledge and skills through education and practice.

STRENGTHS OF THE ASSOCIATE’S DEGREE NURSE

As an associate’s degree nurse (ADN), you have been prepared with the knowledge and skills to be a nurse. You have been groomed to be a capable, caring, and dedicated healthcare professional who plays an important role in the care of patients in various communities (Mahaffey, 2002). Some would even argue that you may be more clinically prepared than new BSN graduates (Lauren1021, 2006). You have had the opportunity to have first-rate clinical experiences in many settings—acute as well as community based. You have undoubtedly worked with experienced faculty with a strong clinical focus. Your ADN education provides you a solid foundation to develop your leadership skills with your continued education.

BUILDING ON THE ASSOCIATE’S DEGREE FOUNDATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL NURSE ROLE EVOLUTION

The professional nurse role has evolved over the past decade with attention given to the differences among registered nurses educated at the associate’s degree level from those who are educated at the baccalaureate level.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) states that the educational preparation of baccalaureate nurses should include leadership, an essential aspect of the role of the registered nurse (AACN, 2014). Nurses educated at the ADN level may not have had formal education on the concept of leadership. However, there is no doubt ADN's have experience with the concept in everyday practice. Nurses are called to be leaders because part of their daily work, while delivering patient care and when working with colleagues to address concerns, influences the practice of nursing. Studying leadership will help you to be well prepared to meet the demands of nursing today. It will provide you with the knowledge and skills to be a leader at the bedside across a variety of settings. Although you might not be entertaining the idea now, it will also assist you should you be interested in a formal leadership position in the future. For example, our nation's Magnet® hospitals are requiring all nurse managers/leaders to have a baccalaureate or graduate degree in nursing (ANCC, 2014).

LEADERSHIP EXPECTATIONS OF THE PROFESSIONAL NURSE

The AACN has established *The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice* (2008). This document outlines what is expected of a BSN graduate and takes into account the recommendations of National Academy of Medicine (formerly the Institute of Medicine) regarding the core knowledge necessary for healthcare professionals. The AACN *Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice* clearly notes that leadership is an essential expectation of the professional nurse. In particular, the document notes professional nurses should acquire leadership skills that involve making ethical decisions, establishing and maintaining collegial relationships, using civil collaboration and communication in interprofessional teams, coordinating care, delegating, and demonstrating effective conflict-resolution techniques. Professional nurses need to understand complex systems as well as the influence of power, policy, politics, and regulatory standards on these systems.

According to AACN (2008), some of the leadership expectations of the professional nurse are as follows:

- Apply leadership concepts, skills, and decision-making in provision of high-quality nursing care, healthcare team coordination, and the oversight and accountability for care delivery in a variety of settings.
- Demonstrate leadership and communication skills to effectively implement patient safety and quality improvement initiatives within the context of the interprofessional team.
- Demonstrate an awareness of complex organizational systems.

- Demonstrate a basic understanding of organizational structure, mission, vision, philosophy, and values.
- Participate in quality and patient safety initiatives, recognizing that these are complex system issues, which involve individuals, families, groups, communities, populations, and other members of the healthcare team. (p.14)

The competencies, skills, and decision-making that are discussed throughout this book will help you to develop the capacity to be an effective leader. The process requires self-assessment, reflection, and much time and effort. To get started, refer to Box 1.2 to assess your

BOX 1.2 SELF-ASSESSMENT

Self-assessment: Are you a leader?

This is not a scientific self-assessment but rather is intended to foster reflection. Please answer "yes" or "no" to the following questions:

- Do colleagues ask you for your clinical opinion/expertise regarding patient care?
- Do colleagues ask your opinion regarding ethical issues in your practice area?
- Do people ask you to help resolve conflicts?
- Do people confide in you?
- Do people turn to you for guidance in unclear situations?
- Do people find what you have to say as important even though they might disagree?
- Do people consider you a role model?
- Do you solve problems in your work environment?
- Do you develop solutions to workplace issues?
- Do you have a vision for how things should be done?
- Do you bring out the best in people?
- Do you encourage the growth and development of your colleagues?
- Are you currently driven by a set of career goals?
- When you recognize a negative issue in your healthcare setting, are you comfortable with developing an argument for change?
- Are you persuasive?
- Are you approachable?
- Is your communication style clear and direct?

If you answered "yes" to most of these questions, you are most likely already a leader in your area. Do not worry if you did not answer "yes" to many of these questions. Sometimes it is easier to learn evidence-based skills the first time rather than having to relearn skills that might not be backed by any evidence. Remember, leadership is a learned skill you can hone through education and practice. This book provides you with information to develop your leadership competencies, skills, and decision-making.

leadership. Although completing a self-assessment is a good start to becoming an effective leader, you should also engage in reflective practice to increase your self-awareness coupled with education, training, and experience.

QUALITY AND SAFETY EDUCATION for NURSES (QSEN) CONSIDERATIONS

As you read the following QSEN competencies (Box 1.3) related to leadership, ask yourself:

- Which of these competencies do I meet and which competencies do I need to develop more fully?
- What plan of action can I take to enhance those competencies in which I am weak and to develop those which I lack at this time?

BOX 1.3 LEADERSHIP: SELECT RELEVANT QSEN COMPETENCIES

- Describe own strengths, limitations, and values in functioning as a member of a team
- Initiate plan for self-development as a team member
- Act with integrity, consistency and respect for differing views
- Appreciate importance of intra- and inter-professional collaboration
- Recognize contributions of other individuals and groups in helping patient/family achieve health goals
- Assume role of team member or leader based on the situation
- Value the perspectives and expertise of all health team members
- Respect the unique attributes that members bring to a team, including variations in professional orientations and accountabilities
- Describe impact of own communication style on others
- Discuss effective strategies for communicating and resolving conflict
- Demonstrate a commitment to team goals
- Solicit input from other team members to improve individual, as well as team, performance
- Value teamwork and the relationship upon which it is based
- Participate in designing systems that support effective teamwork

Source: Quality and Safety Education for Nurses Institute. (2014). QSEN competencies. Retrieved from <http://qsen.org/competencies/pre-licensure-ksas>

HOW DO LEADERSHIP SKILLS DIFFER FROM MANAGEMENT SKILLS?

In this book, we not only address leadership skills but also consider management skills. As we have discussed, leadership skills involve the development of a vision, setting goals effectively, and motivating others to reach those goals. Leadership requires the ability to influence to achieve desired outcomes. Management skills, on the contrary, involve overseeing operations and processes. Management skills involve how you handle the day-to-day operations of the unit and help people to work together efficiently and harmoniously. It helps to understand those with whom you work and what motivates them so you can identify the right approach. Chapter 3 will further help you distinguish between leadership and management behaviors.

CONCLUSIONS

Leaders are needed at the bedside to help inspire others to achieve patient outcomes. Leadership is not just about the position you hold but about self-awareness, knowledge of processes, and relationships with others. In addition to improving patient care, your leadership abilities can potentially benefit you with personal as well as professional satisfaction. Learning about leadership will build upon the knowledge you have from your ADN education and prepare you for the essential expectations of the baccalaureate-prepared professional nurse. Throughout this book, we focus on leadership and management competencies, skills, and decision-making necessary for the professional nurse. This information coupled with self-reflection and practice/experience will help you become the effective leader that healthcare needs you to be.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Develop your own definition of leadership in one or two sentences.
- Interview two nurses who you feel are leaders. Ask them for their definition of leadership. How does their definition compare to what you learned in this chapter and compare to your personal definition of leadership? What are the qualities that led you to see them as leaders? How do these leaders influence your leadership style at this time?
- Do you feel it is important for nurses to support and value leadership at all levels of an organization? Explain.

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