

# “Nurse manager” and “nurse leader”- Synonyms or complementary terms?

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** In most situations, the terms nurse manager and nurse leader are used interchangeably although they do not have the same meaning. The demanding role of a chief nurse in health care settings has undergone several changes, while some terms like “chief nurse”, “nurse manager”, “nurse leader” are often not distinguished enough and lead to misconceptions.

**Aim:** To explore and scrutinize the clear definition of “nurse manager” and “nurse leader” and explore the role of these key positions in nursing.

**Results:** Manager and leader differ in the point of view, the goals and the implemented actions. Managers aim to maximize the efficiency by organizing employers, but leaders aim mainly to influence and inspire employers. Nurse managers try to manage desired objectives of the health organization through technical and interpersonal activities. Their role includes activities like planning, organizing, staffing, controlling. In contrast, leaders focus on empowering others, as well as motivating, inspiring, and influencing others. All nurses are leaders and managers at some grade but an effective leader may not excel at management, and a manager may not be an effective leader.

**Conclusions:** Leadership and management are two linked terms with different meanings, which are often not distinguished enough. Literature supports that the ideal chief combines both managerial and leadership skills and has specific attributes.

**Key-words:** administration, health care, leader, manager, nursing

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## INTRODUCTION

Today's the process to improving the quality of health care is moving in a new direction in a trial to tackle the obstacles in a demanding environment. One effective way of achieving quality assurance of health care organizations is successful management systems which will ensure the right function of the institutes.

The demanding role of a chief nurse in health care settings has undergone several changes, while some terms like "head nurse", "nurse manager", "nurse leader" are often not distinguished enough and lead to misconceptions (Taylor & Kramer 1985). Nowadays, the clarification and the clear definition of these roles are a major concern for the researchers.

There is some evidence that the management style and the leadership style of the chief nurse is linked to job satisfaction, quality of care and effective functioning of the unit (Anthony et al. 2005). The role of a chief nurse and his/her behavior in the nursing unit has been strongly associated with the terms of effectiveness, productivity and the patient outcomes as well (Wong & Cummings 2005). Furthermore, research findings reveal that nurses need positive relationships with their nurse administrators in order to work effectively and live up to their daily demanding duties.

In most situations, the terms nurse manager and nurse leader are used interchangeably although they do not have the same meaning. An ideal nurse coach has to possess a number of personal characteristics and, additionally, both managerial and leadership capabilities that allow him/her to be a vital component of a nursing unit. This article sets out to explore and scrutinize the clear definition of these terms and, secondly, to explore the role of these key positions in nursing.

## B. TERMS' DEFINITIONS

### MANAGEMENT

Management has been defined as the art of doing things right (Barret 2003). Additionally, it has been described as a process of social and technical functions occurring within an organization and aiming to the achievement of specific targets through humans and other resources (Longest et al. 2000). Managers work through and with other people and try to manage desired objectives of the organization through technical and interpersonal activities.

Particularly, managers implement the following management functions (Longest et al. 2000): a) Planning: Direct and determine what needs to be accomplished by setting priorities and goals. b) Organizing: Overall design of the organization where the manager is responsible. Furthermore, it means designating reporting relationships and intentional patterns of interaction. c)

Staffing: Gain and maintain human resources, develop and retain personnel through specific tasks. d) Controlling: Monitoring staff activities and performance and taking the appropriate actions for corrective action to increase performance. e) Directing: Initiate action in the organization through effective leadership and motivation of workforce. f) Decision-making: Effective decisions based on things of risks and benefits and the drawbacks of alternatives.

The effective achievement of these goals presupposes a number of key managers' characteristics and skills (Farey 1993). Specifically, Katz (1974) identified some key attributes of the effective manager in order to achieve the demanded goals and tasks. Below are presented the key characteristics of a nurse manager which include: a) Conceptual skills are those skills that reflect the ability to critically think, analyze and determine strategies in order to manage problems. b) Technical skills are those skills that involve ability to perform a specific work task. c) Interpersonal skills are those skills that are linked with the ability of a manager to communicate and collaborate with other individuals, regardless of whether they are peers, supervisors, or subordinates.

### LEADERSHIP

Northouse (2004) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal". There are two main kinds of leadership style: the "transformational" and "transactional" leadership.

**"Transformational Leadership"**: In this kind of leadership "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (Ramey 2002). Transformational leadership, an independent variable, includes the dimensions of idealized influence (attributed), idealized influence (behavior), inspirational motivation, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Transformational leaders work by implementing new ideas and try to change the organizational culture. They also have the ability to make people want to change and lead to change. There are three key elements for transformation leadership:

- a) Inspiration and Charisma: Builds and sustains an emotional bond that overcomes the psychological and emotional resistance to change.
- b) Intellectual Stimulation: Provides the new solutions and innovations that empower members.
- c) Individual Consideration: Encourages members because they actually know the leaders. Enhances the motivation, morale, and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms.

**"Transactional Leadership"**: This kind of leadership is based on the concept of exchange between leader

and group members and works by supervision and group performance. Leader provides resources and rewards in exchange for motivation, productivity, effective goal, or task accomplishments (Hargis et al. 1993). Transactional leadership, an independent variable, includes the dimensions of contingent reward, management-by-exception (active), management-by-exception (passive), and laissez-faire (Aarons 2006).

There are four forms of transactional leadership:

- a) Contingent Reward: Positively reinforce appropriate behaviors / Negatively reinforce inappropriate behaviors.
- b) Active Management By Exception: Watch groups and have correcting action.
- c) Passive Management By Exception: The leader intervenes only if tasks and goals are not met.
- d) Laissez-Faire MBE: Leave group alone and only interact when there are challenges or when goals are not achieved.

Transactional leaders are not looking to change the future, they are looking to merely keep things the same by working in the organizational culture (Hargis et al. 1993). This type of leadership is effective in crisis and emergency situations and specific circumstances. More in depth presentation of the two different definitions are presented in Table 1.

### C. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MANAGER AND LEADER

Leadership and management are two necessarily linked terms with different meanings, which often are not distinguished. Manager and leader differ in the point of view, the goals and the implemented actions (Table II). Managers aim to maximize the efficiency by organizing employers, but leaders aim mainly to influence and inspire employers. In addition, the manager's job is to plan, delegate, organize and coordinate while leader's

aim to guide and motivate their personnel. To summarize, leaders focus on empowering others, as well as motivating, inspiring, and influencing others and a successful leader possesses excellent nursing communication skills and interpersonal skills as well.

### D. THE IDEAL CHIEF NURSE

All nurses are leaders and managers at some grade but the ideal chief combines the characteristics and the skills of both. Cook (2001) tried to identify the attributes of the effective nurse leaders through a qualitative study. He revealed that there are five attributes of the effective clinical nurse leaders, which include highlighting, respecting, influencing, creativity and supporting.

A Delphi survey was undertaken of 22 European member states in order to identify the attributes deemed to be essential to a Chief Nurse (Hennessy & Hicks 2003). It is worth noting that there was a surprisingly high level of agreement regarding the qualities required of the ideal Chief Nurse. According to a large amount of literature, three are the main characteristics of a successful nurse leader; social influence (the extent to which someone can direct and change others behaviors and beliefs), leadership capability (planning and motivating) and authority (the ability to achieve goals). Other researchers stated that leaders tend to be intelligent and knowledgeable (Lorentzon 1992) and able to possess the required personal characteristics (Tremblay 2000).

The Delphi survey showed that the ideal chief nurse should possess the following attributes (Hennessy & Hicks 2003):

- a) Communication
- b) Team-working
- c) Strategic thinking
- d) Professional credibility

**Table 1.**  
**Differences between transactional and transformational leadership**

Transactional	VS	Transformational
Leadership is responsive		Leadership is proactive
Work in the same, old conditions		Work by leading to change
Works within the organizational culture		Works to change the organizational culture by implementing new ideas
Employees achieve objectives through rewards and punishments set by leader		Employees achieve objectives through higher ideals and moral values
Motivates followers by appealing to their own self interest		Motivates followers by encouraging them to put group interests first
Management-by-exception: maintain the status quo; stress correct actions to improve performance.		Individualized consideration: Each behavior is directed to each individual to express consideration and support. Intellectual stimulation: Promote creative and innovative ideas to solve problems.

Source: Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>)

- e) Leadership
- f) Political astuteness
- g) Decency/integrity
- h) Innovation
- i) Decision-making/problem solving
- j) Personal qualities
- k) Promotion of nursing
- l) Good management
- m) Conflict resolution
- n) Information handling
- o) Research skills
- p) Physical characteristics.

Moreover, the ideal chief nurse is expected to develop further skills including:

- a) Leading by example - Leading by example is a central theory of most popular leadership philosophies. Usually the leaders provide a role model for the staff to adopt and expect from the employers to imitate this attitude/practice.
- b) Openness and communication - A nurse manager must be able to be open, listen and communicate effectively with physicians, hospital administration, patients and nurses.
- c) Leadership skills - The ideal nurse manager should have leadership skills and motivate, guide and inspire the employees in the nursing unit in a trial to create supportive hospital environment.

## E. DISCUSSION

Several studies have revealed that there is a number of factors contributing into nurse management and leadership style (Jenkins & Ladewig 1996; Kondrat 2001; Perkel 2002). A recent systematic review showed that previous leadership experience was positively related to leader's skillfulness and capability (Jenkins & Ladewig 1996; Perkel 2002) although length of time in the same position was negatively associated with successful leadership (Iurrita 1988).

Moreover, age is a factor contributing to leadership skills with a number of studies reporting that older and more experienced nurses were more effective leaders. Educational activities, like leadership development programs, seem to consist a main factor contributing to increased leadership effectiveness (Cleary et al. 2005; George et al. 2002). Conclusively, research findings confirmed that high educated, overqualified and experienced nurses become successful leaders.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF NURSE MANAGER SUPPORT

Nurse manager role includes development of goals and plans, decision making, clinical practices and staff support as well. Consistent with the literature there is strong relationship between the nurse manager support, the healthy work environment (Cullen 1999; Tourangeau 2003; Cummings & Estabrooks 2003), the

retention of staff, (Estabrooks et al. 2001; Estabrooks et al. 2003; Cowden et al. 2011) and the job satisfaction and positive work attitudes (Laschinger et al. 2008; Tourangeau 2003).

Nurse managers attitudes are the main cause of nurse retention in an organization (Shirey 2006). The results of a survey conducted in 39 hospitals, showed that 100% of the respondents reported that their nurse manager was main factor in employees' decision to leave the organization noting that lack of manager support is a main reason for leaving their jobs (Taunton et al. 1997). By extension, nurse managers' behavior and the staff support have been strongly associated with the quality of the provided care (Buchan 1999).

Taunton et al. (1997) reported that 40% of nurses during the 6-month period of the study asked to move to other nursing unit because of their nurse manager. Effective performance in the nurse manager role is the cornerstone to the empowerment of staff and high rates of productivity (Lachinger 1999). Nurse managers' practices have been associated with the grade of nursing staff's autonomy in daily practice (Force 2005; Kramer 2006) and with the quality of teamwork and collaborative relationships between physicians and nurses (Knaus 1986; Schmalenberg et al. 2005).

## THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN NURSING LEADERSHIP AND PATIENT OUTCOMES

A large proportion of the existing literature referred to nurse leadership associates leadership effectiveness with patient adverse events and complications (Wong & Cummings 2007; Cummings et al. 2010). Particularly, Anderson et al. (2003) showed that positive leadership including like communication openness and participation in decision-making resulted to a safer healthcare environment by reducing the frequency of adverse events. In addition, Houser (2003) showed a significant correlation between positive leadership and reduced patient falls and medication errors.

Additionally, strong leadership has been associated with reduced incidence of neonatal periventricular haemorrhage/ periventricular leukomalacia (PIVH/PVL) (Pollack & Koch 2003) and positive leadership Houser with reduced incidence of pneumonia and urinary tract infections (UTIs) (Houser 2003).

## THE ROLE OF NURSE MANAGER IN EVIDENCE-BASED NURSING PRACTICE IMPLEMENTATION

Consistent with other research, leadership factors such as support and commitment of managers influence the adoption of changes, innovations and new knowledge in organizations (Damanpour 1991; Elenkov & Manev 2005).

Nursing leadership is considered as an essential factor for promoting evidence-based practice in nursing (Newhouse 2007; Melnyk & Fineout 2011; Wilkinson et

al. 2011) and many researcher highlight the need for nurse managers to play supporting role in evidence based practice implementation (Parahoo & McCaughan 2001; Gifford et al. 2007; Gifford & Davies 2008). Nurse managers and administrators are responsible for evidence integration and knowledge translation into daily practice. Their role is strongly linked with the grade of nursing staff's involvement into seeking information and research utilization. However, a number of studies describe managers and administrators as major barriers or facilitators to research utilization (Hutchinson & Johnston 2006; Newhouse 2007; Poe & White 2010).

## G. CONCLUSIONS

Conclusively, literature exposes significant discrepancies between the terms "nurse manager" and "nurse leader". However, in most situations, the terms are used interchangeably but they do not have the same meaning. A leader is a person that possesses interpersonal skills to guide, inspire and influence others towards a target. A manager is the person that controls and organizes the employers in the organization. Notably, an effective leader may not excel at management, and a manager may not be an effective leader. The ideal combination in the demanding role of a chief nurse is both managerial and leadership skills at the same level.

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