



Is Being a Chief Nursing Officer in Your Future?

It is expected that nearly 55 percent of nurse leaders will be retiring from their positions within the next decade (Hader, Saver and Steltzer, 2006). This will leave a tremendous void but it will also mean that outstanding leadership opportunities will be within the profession of nursing. You may want to consider a career in nursing management if inspiring and leading others appeal to you.

It is never too early to begin planning for a long-term career in nursing. If you think you might want to someday lead your colleagues or a healthcare organization, the time to start planning is when you are a nursing student.

What opportunities are available in nursing management?

There are several levels of nursing management positions based upon the type of services that the health care organization provides. Relative to your experience, educational preparation, and leadership attributes, there are exciting and challenging career opportunities at each level.

Entry Level

An entry level management position is usually at the supervisory or assistant nurse manager level. To be qualified for this position, you will typically need 2-3 years of experience in the clinical area that you desire to manage. At this level of the organization, expert clinical skills are required as the role necessitates managing the daily operations of a department. The front line supervisor should display an in-depth understanding of the clinical area learned from past experiences; understand what to expect in particular situations; and modify actions and goals in response to these events.

The supervisor must also act as a clinical resource to colleagues in the care of a particular patient population.

Nurse Manager

This middle management role is the leader of a particular clinical department and is responsible for the business unit 24/7. The leader assumes the role similar to that of the chief executive officer of a small company who is responsible for overseeing five key areas: personnel, quality, service, business growth, and financial solvency. The leader has the ability to hire staff best suited to meet the strategic and operational needs of the department. He/she must develop strong professional relationships and trust among the staff.

The quality of the care that is delivered to patients within their department is of paramount importance to the nurse manager. The leader must develop and implement a quality infrastructure that insures that patients are receiving the highest quality of care at all times and without exception. Ensuring that the care

is patient and family-centered will result in high patient satisfaction and increase the likelihood of patients returning to your organization for future care. Financial solvency is critical to the success of the organization. If there is not a positive profit margin, the institution will be unable to fulfill the mission of delivering health care to the community.

Director Level

A nursing leader at this entry-level position into executive leadership has responsibility for several departments or a clinical service line. This position requires extensive knowledge of the health care environment in order to plan, develop, implement and evaluate strategic operations of the institution. A global understanding of the operations of the healthcare organization is essential

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for success. The leader is responsible for coordinating the development and implementation of recommendations and strategies to initiate new programs and improve current services. This results in better outcomes and increased market share and profitability.

The Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) is the highest ranking administrative nurse in the organization. The CNO is responsible for the practice of nursing throughout the organization by ensuring consistency in the standard of practice across all clinical settings. As a member of the executive team, the CNO supports and facilitates an interdisciplinary team approach to the delivery of care. This includes creating a nursing environment in which collaboration is valued and excellence in clinical care, education, and research is promoted and achieved.

The CNO must ensure the continued advancement of the profession of nursing by identifying and articulating the vision and strategic direction for the discipline of nursing and collaborating on the implementation of strategies to achieve them. As the senior spokesperson for nursing, the CNO must provide leadership and direction for the development of strategies to promote the recruitment, retention, and recognition of excellence in nursing that are consistent with the mission, vision and values of the organization.

What does it take to be a nursing leader?

There are four major components to preparing yourself for a leadership position in nursing: knowing yourself, your experience, your educational preparation, and your work ethic. (Hader 2007)

Know yourself: Ask yourself these questions: Are you a take-charge individual? Do you like to plan and implement strategies to improve the way work is accomplished? If you answered “yes” then you are on your way to preparing yourself for a leadership position.

The best way to gain a better understanding of yourself is to ask a trusted friend or peer to critically evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. A friend or colleague may enlighten you on some of your own personality characteristics. Ask them how you are perceived by others. Do you have the ability to gain consensus when there are disagreements between groups?

Objectively conducting a self analysis is paramount to success as a leader. Leadership requires innovation, the ability to take risks, good communication skills and a passion to achieve excellence. Without these fundamental characteristics it will be very difficult to sustain the pressures and responsibility of a leadership role.

Experience: It is never too early to gain leadership experience. As a nursing student, you should strongly consider being an active member or board member of the local, state, or national nursing student organization. Active

Choose the Role That's Right For You

Role	Experience Required	Educational Preparation
Supervisor / Assistant Nurse Manager	2-3 years in the clinical area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ RN licensure ■ BSN preferred
Nurse Manager	3-5 years in the clinical area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ BSN required ■ MSN preferred ■ National certification in nursing management
Director	5-7 years of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ MSN or master's degree in health or business related field ■ National certification in nursing management
Vice President, Chief Nursing Officer	7-10 years of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ MSN or master's degree in health or business related field ■ Doctorate in nursing preferred ■ National certification in nursing management

involvement in these professional organizations develops your ability to understand the global perspective of nursing. Understanding the issues in the profession will stimulate you to begin to develop strategies to improve the level of care provided to the community.

Networking with nurses who hold leadership positions helps build a coalition of colleagues whose guidance you can seek as you begin your professional career. It is through this process that you will likely find a mentor whom you can rely upon to help build your career as a nurse leader.

Education: It is essential that you attain a graduate degree in nursing administration, business or health care. Undergraduate education in nursing does not provide the necessary information or develop the skill set necessary to be successful as a nurse leader. There are a variety of graduate programs to choose from and many offer a dual degree in both nursing and business administration (leading to both an MSN and an MBA). The combination of these two credentials provides you with theoretical knowledge which can easily be applied in the work setting. If your intent is to lead an organization

that is a university affiliate or a teaching hospital, a doctorate in nursing is typically required. To enhance your qualifications, there are a variety of fellowships and certifications available through professional organizations.

Work ethic: Leading others requires a strong commitment and long work days. Leaders need to be available to their staffs. You will often have to sacrifice time that would otherwise be spent with family and friends, personal obligations or interests. Days are often extended to late evening hours to attend meetings, functions, and events to represent the organization. Clarify with your potential employer what the expectations of the position are beyond the normal workday. Does this time commitment fit into the needs of your personal life? Are you prepared to

make changes that intrude on your free time to benefit the organization?

Life as a Leader

Being a nursing leader is one of the most fulfilling professional roles in nursing. The role provides you with opportunities to be creative, build relationships, network with colleagues from throughout the country and, often, the world and make a significant impact on the care that is delivered to patients. The position can be challenging; but the benefit of participating in the creation of an environment in which nurses can do their best is very rewarding.

Start now to develop your career as a leader. Get involved, network, choose a mentor and become actively engaged in your professional organization! @

references

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Dr. Richard Hader is the Sr. Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer for Meridian Health in Wall, NJ. In addition, he is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Nursing Management* journal. He is also a past NSNA Vice President (1984-1985).