



**BC NURSES'
UNION**

Standing up for health care

POSITION STATEMENT



NURSING LEADERSHIP

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BC NURSES' UNION BELIEVES THAT:

British Columbians have the right to high quality nursing services in hospitals, residential care facilities and communities. Strong nursing leadership optimizes the care provided by nurses.

Skilled nurse leaders make a long-term positive impact on nurses' recruitment, retention, job satisfaction and more.¹

Units that are staffed with capable nursing leadership produce more satisfied patients with better health outcomes.^{2,3}

To optimize the impact of nursing leadership in BC, nurse leaders must have the authority to:

- > Be actively involved in decision making at all administrative levels so that they can determine standards of nursing practice and patient care.
- > Have a key say in resource utilization, contribute to the development of clinical and management information systems, actively participate in the selection of assessment of technologies and shape their own professional development programming.⁴
- > Meet nurses' needs, in terms of education and quality of work-life.⁵
- > Establish formal mentoring initiatives for new nurse graduates, making mentoring a deliberate, supported and planned process.

**BACKGROUND:
STRUCTURAL
CHANGES IN HEALTH
SERVICES HAVE**

RESULTED IN A SIGNIFICANT LOSS OF NURSING LEADERSHIP

Nurses are a majority of the healthcare workforce yet nurse management positions have been excessively downsized. The removal of the Head Nurse role, in particular, has resulted in loss of front-line leadership that benefitted nurses and ultimately, patients.⁶ Healthcare reform and downsizing in the past few decades created 'flatter' organizational designs and new management structures. Now, fewer nursing leaders do more work. Huge gaps exist in the care of patients, residents and clients.

The current shortage of nurses will create a shortage of nursing leadership—at a time when the demand for services is increasing. Most nurses do not receive enough support from existing management structures and in some cases this is because their managers are non-nurses and lack clinical skills. Nurses report feelings of dissatisfaction with the amount of control and responsibility in their job.⁷

Nursing leaders are overburdened with huge numbers of direct reports and many patients under their care; more staff per nursing leader creates less safety, learning, productivity, and quality of leader-staff exchange.⁸ Even excellent leaders are unable to maintain high standards when they are burdened with too many people to supervise.

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WHAT IS NURSING LEADERSHIP?

Leadership in nursing creates structure, implements processes and facilitates positive outcomes in nursing care.⁹ Solving complex nursing problems requires effective nurse leadership.¹⁰ For nurses, leadership is required in four domains: clinical practice, research, education and administration.

The qualities of nurse leaders include: demonstrating different leadership approaches; empowering others, especially staff nurses; displaying excellent clinical skills; using professional and procedural knowledge to guide ethical decision-making; enhancing staff relationships through collaborative problem-solving and more.¹¹

WHY IS NURSING LEADERSHIP IMPORTANT?

Retention and quality of work life for nurses is greatly enhanced when a knowledgeable and capable nurse leader is accessible to them. In the crucial first 3-6 months of employment, for example, better orientation by skilled leaders assists new nurses in exhibiting superior job

performance and developing long term commitments to the setting. Many nurses, starting a new job, receive only a short orientation, which increases feelings of anxiety that create loss of commitment and eventually, attrition.¹²

Good nurse leadership also benefits patients as nurse leaders are a vital aspect of healthcare structures, identifying patient and system issues and implementing strategies to address these issues with the goal of enhancing patient care. Patient outcomes improve when nursing care improves under the supervision of an experienced leader.¹³ A recent BC study showed that greater numbers of RN managers per hospital bed is associated with lower hospital mortality rates.¹⁴ Satisfaction rates are higher when nurse leaders have reasonable numbers of direct reports.¹⁵ Finally, strong nurse leadership benefits the entire healthcare team. All staff benefit from having a knowledgeable nurse colleague to turn to when they have questions. Finally, effective nurse leaders are essential in the much needed transformation of healthcare culture that will foster enhanced patient safety and more respectfully value nurses' contributions.

HOW CAN NURSING LEADERS BE NURTURED?

Nurses often take on leadership positions with enthusiasm when they are provided with tools, training and the active support and encouragement of their managers. More specifically, increasing general leadership opportunities for all levels and positions, including frontline nurses, would encourage more nurses to consider leadership positions. At UBC a nursing leadership institute was evaluated as a valuable resource that ought to be continued because it assisted in honing nurses' leadership skills, providing them time for networking and reflection and ultimately

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empowering nurses to feel more confident about themselves and their capacity as leaders in the healthcare system.¹⁶

Identifying and establishing nursing leader competencies will assist in the formalization of leadership education for nurses.

However, nurses cannot improve the culture of their work environment on their own, regardless of the amount and quality of training and support they receive or the depth of their commitment. Lasting cultural and behavioral change

requires consistent commitment, leadership and guidance from senior management.⁷ It is imperative that nurse leaders are part of senior executive structures in order to represent nurses and improve the healthcare system.

To make improvements in quality, we need to transform organizational culture by improving the effectiveness of senior leadership and quality improvement systems. We need to: emphasize nurses' contributions to societal health; highlight and reward organizations that are holistic, cost-effective, offer choice and achieve good outcomes; establish partnerships that bring together researchers, clinicians, consumers, providers and policy leaders.

BCNU: SUPPORTING NURSE LEADERS TO EXCEL IN CARING FOR PATIENTS, NURSES AND THE HEALTH CARE TEAM

BCNU advocates for effective nurse leaders who model the way, inspire shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage empathy. They facilitate client-centered care, collaborative

relationships, and emotional health in complex healthcare environments.¹⁸ BCNU plays a role in educating nurse leaders through steward training, courses in meeting organization and effectiveness, conflict resolution, communication, mediation, work-life issues, union support and other initiatives. BCNU has created nurse leaders who are skilled in various aspects of leadership such as advocacy, systems thinking, policy, communications and contract negotiation. We will continue to foster a strong presence of nursing leadership in all work places for nurses through collaborations with other organizations.

It is urgent that nurse leaders are recruited, educated, supported and sustained as there is a pressing need for more attention to nursing leadership and human resource development. Nurses in all settings can be better leaders with appropriate preparation, education and quality of work life support. Effective nurse leaders are instrumental in creating environments that support healthy patients, satisfied nurses and productive workplaces.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact your BCNU Regional Chair to discuss these issues. Go to www.bcnu.org or look in your **Update** magazine for a list or representatives.