REVIEW AND DISCUSSION PAPERS
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Shifting the paradigm in novice nurse leadership: A discussion paper

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To justify and discuss a model of nurse leadership development that recognises the inherent leadership potential of novice nurses.

Background: Effective nurse leadership is associated with quality and safety of patient care, enhanced staff engagement, organisational efficiency and adaptation to current challenges. Extensive research into nurse leadership has produced a range of evidence-based theoretical frameworks that integrate significant leader characteristics with practice implications. However, few studies encompass inherent leadership characteristics and practice capabilities of novice nurses within a leadership development framework.

Methodology: A review of current academic literature on novice nurse practice and development was undertaken to inform selected themes and discussion.

Discussion: This paper discusses novice nurse leadership development as represented by a novel theoretical framework that places novice nurses within the context of their emerging practice. An exploration of four core dimensions, 1) leading self, 2) engaging others, 3) shaping teams, and 4) embracing innovation, presents opportunities for development within university and workplace learning contexts.

Conclusion: This paper offers a focused and novel framework for developing novice nurse leadership skills. This approach represents a change from traditional paradigms that equate leadership development with seniority.

Implications for research, policy, and practice: This discussion contributes to a wider discussion on the preparation of the nursing workforce for future practice in an environment that is characterised by complex healthcare systems and workforce challenges. Our framework can be used to reflect on current novice nurse leader development in universities and workplaces, and signals avenues for research of current practice areas.

What is already known about this topic?
- There is widespread advocacy for nursing leadership development.
- The positive influence of effective leadership on patient care and nursing workplaces has been established.
- Conceptual frameworks for novice nurse leadership development have emerged from the academic literature.

What does this paper add?
- This paper extends existing frameworks by encompassing inherent leadership characteristics and practice capabilities of novice nurses within a leadership development framework.
- Contemporary novice nurse leader roles, practice challenges and opportunities for development are explored.
- A model of novel nurse leadership that includes leading self, engaging others, shaping teams, and embracing innovation is proposed.

Keywords: Confidence, development, leadership, learning, novice nursing

INTRODUCTION

Retention of nurses in healthcare, as a concerning and escalating global issue, has been met with widespread advocacy for leadership development.[1] The known influence of leadership on job satisfaction and retention,[2] work-related wellbeing,[3] and patient care outcomes,[4] creates a powerful argument for supporting nursing leadership development in this environment. This has created an imperative to examine how leaders are developed and supported, and which behaviours generate the most effective outcomes. This topic has been extensively researched and is well represented in academic literature.

Recognition of the capacity of novice nurses to influence healthcare has generated more recent interest. The authors consider a novice nurse to be an inexperienced nurse and can include student nurses or new graduates. Internationally, recognition has been given to advancing the leadership capability of novice nurses. The World Health Organization (WHO) advocates leadership development in younger nurses and midwives as part of a mandate to prepare future nurse leaders, to address nurse retention and recruitment issues and to optimise population health.[1] Similarly, in response to these issues, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) has advocated for nursing leadership to be developed at all levels.[5] Indirectly, the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) 'Registered Nurse Standards for Practice',[6] presents a number of standards that apply to nurses at all levels. These standards have implications for leadership capability, including relationship development, communication, collaboration, influencing practice and advancing quality and safety. In response to recognition of the leadership potential of novice nurses, this paper presents a framework for nurse leader development that represents a shift in the paradigm from a traditional focus on experienced nurses and those in formal leadership roles to that of novice nurses.

BACKGROUND

Nurse leadership is recognised as being vital to patient safety and to the wellness of healthcare workplaces.[7] Together with acknowledgement of the risks associated with on-the-job leadership learning through trial and error,[8] nurse leadership development has become commonplace. Recent academic literature reports a plethora of initiatives designed to support leadership development for nurses in leadership roles. These initiatives include graduate leadership studies,[9] group interactions, mentoring and peer support,[10] support from established nurse leaders,[11] exposure to learning on business acumen,[12] and targeted approaches specific to learner need and context.[13]

Other studies are specific in their focus on novice nurses and those who are not in formal leadership roles. These studies recognise that the complexity of healthcare and workforce dynamics shapes nursing practice at any stage and demands leadership preparation. Recognition has been given to the skills and capacity of undergraduate nurses to build on existing authentic leadership behaviours.[14] In new graduates, emerging skills in modelling and supporting others provide a basis for the design of the preregistration syllabus.[15] Solid leadership development at the undergraduate level as a means for strengthening the quality of healthcare,[16] and curriculum development that includes leading and managing self and others, as core concepts in a broader curriculum,[17] have also been reported.

Studies that report conceptual frameworks that reflect the development of novice nurses are limited. Conceptual frameworks are useful representations of assumptions about nursing practice and the nature of the phenomenon of interest.[18] James et al., advocated for an action learning approach to novice nurses' leadership development that supported growth of emotional intelligence to advance leadership confidence.[19] Their proposal for novice nurse leadership development included emotional intelligence, leadership styles, teamwork, change and communication. However, specific challenges or developmental strategies within each learning domain were not explored. Doherty and Revell present a comprehensive and holistic representation of authentic leadership that encompasses the history, context, and personal characteristics of nurses across all levels.[20] Their framework articulates access to opportunity and power that, together with self-awareness and regulation, can support authentic leader development. Within the framework, the commitment of authentic leadership to fostering relationships that advance the capability and well-being of others resonates well with the nature of nursing work as a social practice. However, Doherty and Revell's framework does not specifically explore the challenges or developmental strategies that are relevant to novice nurses.

We argue that an approach to leadership development for novice nurses must be reflective of the developmental stage of their practice confidence. The focus of our novice nurse leadership framework on leading self, engaging others, shaping teams, and embracing innovation reflects the challenges and developmental tasks inherent in the experience of being a novice nurse. This framework builds on the model proposed by James et al.,[19] by exploring more deeply and specifically novice nurse leadership challenges and developmental strategies. In focusing on novice nurses, our conceptual framework also extends the work of Doherty and Revell, whose authentic leadership model is applicable to leaders at all levels.[20] Our model presents a focused view of the key leadership behaviours that are relevant to novice nurse practice and explores avenues for leadership development of novice nurses within these domains.

METHODS

The authors were inspired by theoretical insights acquired during formal leadership engagement that promoted renewed reflection on leadership development within nursing practice. A focused review of current academic literature on novice nurse practice and development was subsequently undertaken to inform selected themes and discussion. The authors, in collaboration, extended their analysis to develop a visual representation of emerging themes and their interrelationships.

DISCUSSION

Nursing leadership is a relational practice whereby an individual engages others to achieve a goal and, in so doing, develops collaborative team relationships and the achievement of individual potential.[21] Leadership capability is inherent across the spectrum of nursing practice, from novice to expert and is arguably bound to the ability to lead, rather than to clinical seniority.[22] Nurturing leadership development in novice nurses is therefore relevant to individual practice and to the professional identity of the nursing profession.

Further to strategies undertaken to develop leadership capability, the capacity for leadership is also based on a range of antecedents. Individual history and experience, recognised as antecedents to leadership engagement,[20,23] have particular relevance to novice nurse leader development. Life experiences offer opportunities for leadership learning through participation, observation, modelling and self-reflection, forming the history of experience that nurses bring to their nursing work. These antecedents may serve to support early development of leadership skills alongside that of clinical practice.

Our consideration of novice nurse leadership as a dimension of nursing practice that is dependent on context and opportunities for development is reflected in the following discussion of four key interrelated domains: 1) leading self, 2) engaging others, 3) shaping teams, and 4) embracing innovation.

LEADING SELF

The concept of 'leading self' is founded on reflective practice and a commitment to ongoing professional development. Reflective practice, foundational to nursing practice and philosophy in Australia, is well defined in the 'Registered Nurse Standards for Practice', as "develops practice through reflection on experiences, knowledge, actions, feelings and beliefs to identify how these shape practice."[6p.3] Self-leadership is a deliberate approach to considering one's influence within the workplace, and reflection is based on developing personal capacity to influence within the scope of personally determined goals and the wider organisation.[24] Self-leadership occurs as nurses become aware of a challenging situation or feeling that prompts reflective self-dialogue. The concept of self-leadership is associated with performance,[25] and personal mastery,[24] and focuses on achieving personal goals, rather than specific organisational goals. Inherent to self-leadership is the development of personal confidence and efficacy.

The practice of 'leading self' has relevance as a foundational professional development activity for novice nurses and offers a strategy for ongoing enhancement of personal performance and career development. The evolution of professional consciousness through self-leadership can support confidence in communication and ongoing leadership capability,[24] as well as a reduction in stress.[26] However, as novice nurses' personal reflective practices on leadership capability are considered to be limited,[14] there is scope for nursing workplaces to encourage this practice and offer self-leadership education.[27] Student nurses, who often feel ambivalent and self-doubting about the prospect of leading, can develop confidence when supported to engage in self-reflection.[19] Furthermore, opportunities can be provided for novice nurses to be offered an appropriate level of autonomous work and responsibility, known to influence self-leadership capability and confidence.[25] Encouragement to perceive the positive and enjoyable aspects of a task, or natural rewards associated with work, can also strengthen self-leadership and motivation,[25] a finding that has particular relevance for novice nurses.

ENGAGING OTHERS

Central to the practice of 'engaging others' for novice nurses is communication confidence. Being comfortable and skilful in communicating with a wide range of patients, health professionals, and families is a challenging early development task for novice nurses, although one that is foundational for effective practice.[28] Communication is clearly embedded throughout the Registered Nurse Standards for Practice,[6] and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC) Standards (Evidence Guide).[29] Communication confidence, the practice of 'engaging others', is a fundamental leadership skill and is therefore an important focus for novice nurse leadership development.

The intensely social nature of nursing, while a challenge for novice nurses, also presents fertile ground for learning to 'engage others'. Novice nurses' comfort with 'engaging others' through effective communication across the health care team can be supported by the development of self-efficacy,[30,31] and a commitment to 'leading self'.[24] While novice nurse leadership courses are reported as vital for building leadership and communication confidence,[32] development of these personal resources can also be supported through effective mentoring. The novice nurse-mentor relationship has been aptly conceptualised as "walking with another",[33p.23]

an activity that includes sharing, through informal "chat", the meaning of workplace language and practice, and of their developing perspectives on nursing practice. "Walking with another",[33p.23] emphasises an interpersonal learning relationship based on effective communication that provides the mentee with a safe space to transition to their role and to their position within the wider team. Mentoring can also support novices to overcome factors that impact communication confidence, which can include a knowledge deficit and uncertain relationships with other health professionals.[34,35] Furthermore, the development of a sense of psychological empowerment, emotional intelligence and critical reflexivity, also considered foundational to effective engagement with others, can be supported through multidimensional learning experiences including theory and interactive work-based activities.[36] These strategies that foster skills in engaging others can then support immersion in the wider team.[14] The development of early communication skills and confidence in engaging others, therefore, while essential for novice nurses' beginning practice, has dual benefits in developing leadership capability.

SHAPING TEAMS

An effective teamwork environment is globally recognised as an essential tool for achieving effective and patient-centred healthcare.[5] Our discussion above has given emphasis to specific factors that support the development of novice nurse leadership, including leading self and engaging others. These practices are embedded in and fundamental to team development. This is important as teams form the context in which leadership is enacted. Novice nurses who have reflected on their practice and received support that has generated confidence in engaging others can contribute to the nature of the workplace team.

Importantly, novice nurses have a significant, although often understated, role in shaping teams through followership. Followership is the commitment to team values and objectives and involves collaboration and cooperation.[37] While an older study, Crossman and Crossman's emphasis on the influential role of followers captures the role of novice nurses in shaping teams: "Followership is a relational role in which followers have the ability to influence leaders and contribute to the improvement and attainment of group and organisational objectives. It is primarily an upwards influence."[38p.484] The qualities of effective followers are similar to those of effective leaders,[39] as both are concerned with the integrity of the team and its objectives and are united around a common purpose. Followers influence the shape of the team by sharing strategies to address issues, being interested and committed to team goals, asking questions, providing honest feedback and offering challenge and encouragement to the leader and team members.[40] The role of followers in shaping teams can also be considered as a seamless collaboration with the leader, with whom the leadership function is co-created.[41] Effective followers, therefore, can be considered as active and influential, rather than as passive members of the team.

For novice nurses, learning to be a follower is a relevant leadership skill. Unfortunately, the important role of followership in health care is overshadowed by a focus on leadership and leader development.[41,42] Inclusion of follower development in undergraduate programs in nursing,[41] and establishment of followership throughout the curriculum and professional practice, alongside leadership,[42] may address this limitation. An emphasis on the interdependence of leader-follower relationships in the workplace,[41] fosters a powerful learning ground for novice nurse follower-leader development. Based on this assertion, a leader's understanding of followership is foundational to their ability to develop effective followers within the team.[43] Leaders can provide feedback to novice nurses on their follower skills,[42] and can encourage self-assessment to support individual self-awareness and influence on leader and team performance.[44] Deliberate management of factors within health care workplaces that influence follower development has significant implications for the development of leadership capability in novice nurses.

Followers can therefore learn from leaders and, given the influence of informal learning in healthcare workplaces,[45] followers new to the team can also learn from other followers. The novice nurse, as a team member, thereby shapes and is shaped by these interrelationships.

EMBRACING INNOVATION

Innovation in nursing has been considered "the encouragement of professionals to utilise their acquired knowledge and skills in order to generate and develop new ways of working creatively and drawing on technologies, systems, theories and associated partners/stakeholders that may further enhance and evaluate nursing practice"[46p.165] and is considered a characteristic and an outcome of effective leadership.[47] Innovation is often paired with creativity in nursing, which includes an ability to be flexible, adaptable and able to embrace new ideas in collaboration with others.[48] Being innovative is often associated with experience and seniority; however, there is evidence to suggest that the capacity to be innovative can also be dependent on personal attributes such as being curious,[49] or being able to think of novel ways to practice that is useful to the work being done,[48,49] which can be found in nurses at any level.[48,50] Innovation includes having the ability to investigate a practice gap and articulate a vision,[50] and to recognise relationships and resources that support practice enquiry.[48] Advanced nurse leaders, through innovative practice and research, can influence nursing and policy at all levels.[5] There is merit in preparing novice nurses to visualise such possibilities for their future practice, including the development of the skills and confidence to initiate, as

leaders, practice enquiry in their clinical context,[51] a foundational skill that is endorsed by both ANMAC,[29] and the NMBA.[6]

Innovation in nursing has become a focal area of nursing research, as recognition is given to the diverse nature of nursing work, carried out in contexts that are uncertain, changing, requiring adaptation and problem solving, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic.[52] Nurses work with knowledge, evidence and intellectual challenge to address health care issues that defy the use of policy and procedure alone. Nurses working in front-line positions, often considered the 'pointy end' of health care, are in a place where circumstances establish opportunities for innovative responses.[53] Being creative and innovative and identifying areas for improvement also depends on being able to question practice; an important aspect of leadership considered to be less well developed in novice nurses.[15] There is a clear partnership between leadership and innovation, as while leadership enables innovation, opportunities to be creative and innovative can support leader development in novice nurses.

There is an onus on leaders to create opportunities for novice nurses, as future leaders, to develop creative and innovative practice. Workplace cultures that value the development of ideas and different ways of practising provide an environment where nurses at any level can develop their innovative potential.[54] The known influence of knowledge sharing on innovative behaviour supports workplace strategies to advance this behaviour.[54] This can be achieved through involvement in work problem solving as nurses collectively reflect on and reframe problems in a positive way, consider problems from different perspectives and reflect on their own assumptions. Furthermore, developing emotional awareness enhances confidence that can also support innovative practice for novice nurses.[19] Emotional regulation, which involves reflection on emotions, can enable innovative strategies to emerge and precipitate confidence in sharing new ideas.[53] Similarly, work engagement,[55] and psychological empowerment,[56] have been known to foster creative thought and innovative practice. Education in innovation as part of leadership preparation for novice nurses has also proven effective in advancing confidence in innovative practice.[48]

DIMENSIONS OF NOVICE NURSE LEADERSHIP

The four dimensions of novice nurse leadership are represented in Figure 1, which positions the novice nurse at the point of intersection. Figure 1 also reflects the interrelationships between each dimension. The influence of the leading self on the practice of engaging others and shaping teams provides an example of these interrelationships. There is scope for further consideration of the interrelationships between the four dimensions, illustrated in the figure by areas of overlap.
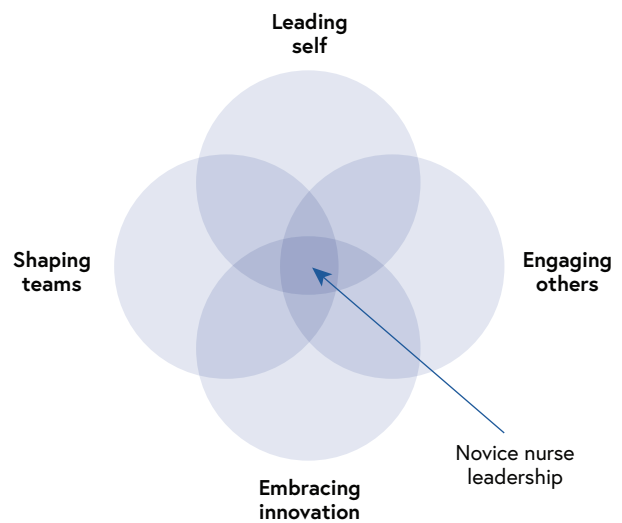

FIGURE 1: DIMENSIONS OF NOVICE NURSE LEADERSHIP

A FRAMEWORK FOR NOVICE NURSE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Our discussion of novice nurse leadership development is represented in Table 1. While the domains and corresponding developmental strategies are listed separately, as a holistic model (see Figure 1) it is reasonable to consider the value of these strategies in supporting development across the four domains.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents an approach to novice nurse leadership development that is cognisant of the challenges that accompany novice nurse practice and represents a change from traditional paradigms that equate leadership development with seniority. The core dimensions of leading self, engaging others, shaping teams, and embracing innovation are interrelated, and form a basis for building an explicit innovative model of novice nurse leadership. This proposal contributes to a wider discussion on the preparation of the nursing workforce for future practice in an environment that is characterised by complex healthcare systems and workforce challenges, but nonetheless, is one that offers rich opportunities for novice nurse leadership development and practice innovation within the nursing profession.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

Universities and nursing workplaces have a role to play in recognising the critical need to support the development of leadership capability for novice nurses. Academics can design and present theoretical and practicum-based learning on self-leadership and innovative practice and can ensure pre-registration student learning about followership is valued

TABLE 1: A FRAMEWORK FOR NOVICE NURSE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Dimension	Strategies for development
Leading self	Self-leadership training, support for self-reflection, provision of opportunities for autonomous work and responsibility at appropriate levels, encouragement to perceive enjoyment in work and natural rewards in work.
Engaging others	Coaching, mentoring, mentoring others within scope of practice, support for development of relationships, leadership training, removal of constraints on development of knowledge, communication confidence and relationships with others, opportunities to participate in simulation and case-based learning.
Shaping teams	Followership development, inclusion of followership training alongside leadership training in workplaces and universities, emphasis on leader-follower relationships, enhance leader understanding of followership and follower development, feedback to novices on follower skills, encourage novice self-awareness of follower skills, team and leader influence, support for follower–follower learning.
Embracing innovation	Provide opportunities for novice nurses to develop creative and innovative practice, support culture that is open to ideas and different ways of practicing, develop workplace avenues for knowledge sharing and problem solving, support individual reflection on assumptions, promote confidence in sharing new ideas, support work engagement and training in innovation.

alongside that of leadership. Within nursing workplaces, nurse managers, educators, and senior clinical nurses can encourage ongoing self-leadership and self-leadership education for nurses. Novice nurses can be allocated an appropriate level of autonomous work and responsibility that fosters a sense of accomplishment and mastery. Workplaces can also provide opportunities for novice nurses to develop their innovative potential through innovation education, involvement in problem-solving, and knowledge sharing. Novice nurse development of communication confidence can be achieved through development of skills that foster engagement with others. Together, universities and nursing workplaces can embed these strategies within student placements. The framework presented in this paper can support reflection on current novice nurse leader development in nursing workplaces. The framework also signals opportunities across the nursing profession to advance novice nurse leader development through ongoing research and curriculum deliberation.

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