

Leadership in nursing skills



Leadership is process of persuading others to work toward achieving the common desired outcomes (Whitehead, Weiss and Tappen, 2007). In healthcare settings, leadership and quality of care are interlinked. Nursing leadership plays vital role in organisational success as it is client oriented. It facilitates and ensures the delivery of best possible care to the clients (Zori & Morrison, 2009) There are certain leadership characteristics that determine the effectiveness of a nurse leader. This essay critically discusses these attributes and also discusses the significance of these characteristics in context of nursing leadership. Furthermore, it briefly explains the effect of change and use of power in nursing to accommodate the change.

A leader is anyone who influences his followers to do what he want them to do for attaining the organisational goals (Sullivan & Decker, 2009). Leaders possess many leadership traits that make them different from their followers and enable them to lead the group effectively (Marquis and Huston, 2009). Key personal qualities of an effective nurse leader are self awareness, integrity, courage and perseverance. Development of an ability to think critically, to share common vision, to manage conflict, delegation and communicating skilfully are essential leadership behaviours that make a nurse leader effective (Whitehead, Weiss and Tappen, 2007).

Identifying the one` leadership skills is very crucial as it enables the person to achieve the organisational goals. The leaders must set an example to influence their followers. They must have high emotional intelligence to understand themselves and others (Linda, 2005). A leader must be self aware. He should know his own strengths and weaknesses. If he recognises his strengths or weaknesses and likes or dislikes, it is much easier for him to

identify others'. Then, they can work together neutralising their weaknesses (Whitehead, Weiss and Tappen, 2007). The focus of leadership should not be they, but, it must be the client. They should emphasize on improving the quality of care provided to their clients (Hiscock & Shuldham, 2008).

Leading an organisation or department is very challenging. The leaders confront many problematic issues everyday, resolving these issues is complex. Successful leaders are critical thinkers too. They must be able to critically analyse the situation using their expertise knowledge and skills. Critical thinking is one of the components of decision making. Using the critical thinking skills, a leader examines the situation, looks for different alternatives and becomes aware of all the risks that may prevent the success of decision being made. Therefore, the leader attempts to avoid such pitfalls and decide the best possible alternative. Critical thinking is not innate, however, it can be learnt during one`s own experiences (Sullivan and Decker, 2009). Ability to share a common vision should be part of an effective leader`s behaviour. Nursing leaders think "outside the box". They are capable to think about better future when the things are currently getting harder to deal with. They are open minded, ready to think laterally and search for different ways to tackle the problems (Morgan, 2010). They should be able to influence others to develop this vision and become involved in different strategies to initiate change (Grossman & Valiga, 2009).

Delegation is also a key attribute of nursing leadership which is learnt with practice. Delegation is reassigning the task to another person which you are supposed to do. Even though, you have delegated the task to anyone else,

you are accountable for the task accomplishment. In healthcare settings, the nurse leader uses her professional judgement while delegating the nursing care to nurses depending upon their abilities and supervises their work too. By doing this, the nurses can gain more confidence and competence in their own performance. As the main focus of leadership is providing quality care to the client, supervision of work by leader nurse ensures that the patient receives standardised care. Hence, it brings them together as a team leading towards attaining the goal of providing safe and quality care to their clients (Whitehead, Weiss and Tappen, 2007).

Communication plays a vital role in successful leadership. To be successful, leaders must develop excellent communication skills. Nurse leaders promote two-way communication. Effective leaders can successfully convey their messages to their followers by verbal and non-verbal communication and they are good listeners also. They encourage valuable suggestions from staff members that can help leaders for bringing about effective changes in organisation. Effective communication facilitates the constructive relationship between them (Marquis and Huston, 2009).

Nowadays, nursing leadership is considered as very crucial factor in promoting health and catering for the unique health needs of the people by providing safe and quality care. It is very important for nurses to develop these leadership characteristics if they want to become a nurse leader (Davison, 2010). It focuses on evidence based practice. Being nurses, they are committed to provide best quality care to the clients. Nurses should believe and understand that their role impacts the clients and the outcomes.

Therefore, they should make best use of their leadership skills to bring improvement in the client care (Hiscock and Shuldham, 2008).

Nurse leaders model high emotional intelligence. It is very useful as it enables them to understand their own and clients` behaviour. Better understanding of client will assist them to recognise and fulfil unique health needs of client and achieve organisational goals. Nurse leaders use critical thinking skills everyday because they engage in making complex decisions related to client care. Critical thinking enables nurses to scrutinize particular situation and choose appropriate action using their sound professional knowledge. This can bring changes and achieve positive health outcomes (Hood, 2010). The nurse leaders have ability to see a changed reality. They also inspire others to see the change and persuade them to contribute towards achievement of the outcome. They must value the contributions of followers (Grossman & Valiga, 2009).

Nurse leaders should exhibit excellent communication skills. As they work as health team member, they need to communicate with all other members of health organisation with a common aim of achieving positive patient outcomes. They share their views and convey the messages clearly to the clients and subordinates. Besides this, nurse leaders are active listeners. They encourage active participation of clients in their own care. Nurse leaders maintain written records, which serves as evidence of care being given. These records can be used to track the delivery of health care. On the other hand, if nurses are unable to communicate effectively, it may lead to chaos as the clients will not receive appropriate care (Grossman & Valiga, 2009). Delegation is an essential leadership trait. Nurse leaders delegate

their work to their subordinates; however, they are accountable for their task. It acts as a tool as it facilitates development of skills of others. It also enables leader to carry out more tasks at the same time. Apart from these, it also develops teamwork (Sullivan & Decker, 2009).

Power can be defined as an ability to influence others to get work done. In healthcare organisations, the power is essential for the organisational effectiveness and workers` satisfaction. Nurses use power to influence clients and other health professionals. To use power effectively, nurses must be knowledgeable about different sources and types of power. All nurses exercise power in one or other way (Whitehead, Weiss & Tappen, 2007). The nurses can use power to improve practice and achieve the goals of an organisation.

When there is a change occurring, it is not taken as granted. The people may resist the change. In such situation, nurses can make effective use of their power to influence others and initiate change. Nurses aim to reduce the resistance by sharing the information, disconfirming currently held beliefs, providing psychological safety and dictating change (Whitehead, Weiss and Tappen, 2007). For instance, nurses can use informational power by sharing the information about the proposed change. They can influence clients by providing knowledge and sharing their vision about improvement of delivery of care (Huntington & Gilmour, 2010). By using expert power, the nurse leaders can explain the reasons why the change is being brought in? They will ensure others that this change will improve their performance. They will appreciate suggestions from them and their concerns about it. Once, the nurse leaders successfully influenced others, they can implement change.

There are many examples of use of power by nurse leaders that brought changes in nursing practice. For instance, in Australia and New Zealand nurses used their power in form of legislative procedure and it enabled nurse practitioners to prescribe medicine (Huntington & Gilmour, 2010).

Nurses are obliged to protect the clients. When the clients need assistance to speak for them, the nurses act as their advocates. Using their power, nurses can present their views and suggestions and can demand for improving the quality of care being delivered to the clients. Nurse leaders should have understanding of clients' rights, ethical issues to protect clients from any harm. For example, when working in Intensive Care Unit, if a nurse recognizes that one of other staff member does not practice good hand hygiene practice as per the norms of the hospital despite of previous warnings given. At first glance, nurse might find it challenging to report this issue to their superiors. However, keeping the client care as focus she will address this problem. This is an effective use of her legitimate power. When the client is not receiving appropriate care and there is need to change the situation, nurses act as protectors. Nurses preserve the rights of clients, protect the clients and monitor the quality of client care (Hood, 2010).

Nurse leaders can use their power effectively by empowering others. They should work together as a team rather than competing with their co-workers. It prevents conflicts and promotes harmony in the healthcare setting. The clients may feel powerlessness due to their diseased conditions. Nurses can empower clients by actively engaging them in their care i. e. by giving them informed choices about their treatment, seeking suggestions to promote their health. This will strengthen their relationship by building trust between

nurse and client and will enable patients to become an active partner rather than a passive recipient (Hood, 2010).

In conclusion, effective leadership is a key element in organisational success. Effective leaders along with their team members, work together in order to achieve organisational goals. Leaders develop certain leadership attributes that enable leaders to influence others to follow them. Nursing leadership is an indispensable part of health care system. It plays a vital role in promoting health and delivery of quality client care. Nursing leadership is client oriented as it works for the best interests of their clients. Nurse leaders exercise power to influence clients, their families and other healthcare professionals in order to achieve positive health outcomes. Change is inevitable in health care. New changes can be introduced successfully with the effective use of power. The focus of care remains clients. The nurse leaders should communicate the change with their colleagues and clients and persuade them to allow this change. The nurses are obliged to protect the rights of clients and ensure optimal delivery of health care services. The changes are made to improve the quality of care and client safety.