

Nurses – essential for improving the health of New Zealanders

Nurses in senior nursing and leadership positions

Nurses¹ hold a range of senior and leadership positions throughout the health sector. This includes (although not an exhaustive list) clinical nurse educators, clinical nurse specialists, nurse practitioners, nurse managers and directors of nursing. Nurses in such positions have a significant influence on working environment, resource management and advocacy, adverse event prevention, nurse retention, and job satisfaction of nurses. Nurses employed and retained in senior positions can lead to significant long-term cost savings for organisations.

A systematic reviewⁱ examining the relationship between nursing leadership and patient outcomes found a range of positive outcomes associated with effective nursing leadership, including:

- > improved patient outcomes, including significantly reduced patient adverse events and complications;
- > an association between leadership and mortality rates, eg through retention of greater staff expertise;
- > increased patient satisfaction where positive leadership behaviours were present. Best results were achieved where the nurse leader had a narrower span of control (the greater the number of nurses under the control of the nurse leader, the poorer the patient satisfaction).

There is also strong evidence that effective nursing leadership improves nurses' productivity and performance in the workplaceⁱⁱ and contributes significantly to a positive working environment.ⁱⁱⁱ This link to a positive working environment is particularly important, as it has been clearly demonstrated that such an environment is strongly associated with lower patient mortality and failure to rescue in acute care environments.^{iv}

New Zealand research clearly demonstrates that the reorganisation of the nursing workforce, in particular dismantling nursing leadership structures between 1990 to 1996 resulted in substantial increases in negative clinical outcomes (with statistically significant increases in the rates for central nervous system complications, decubitus ulcers, sepsis, urinary tract infections, physiological and metabolic derangement, pulmonary failure, and wound infections).^v The Stent Report into Canterbury Health Ltd also identified a range of failings occurring as a result of reorganisation of nursing and dismantling of nursing leadership.^{vi}

¹ Nurse includes registered and enrolled nurses and nurse practitioners unless otherwise indicated.

Nurses in senior nursing and leadership positions provide significant support, mentoring and clinical supervision to less experienced nurses. Nurses in senior nursing and leadership positions provide significant support, mentoring and clinical supervision to less experienced nurses. Clinical supervision costs approximately one per cent of a nurse's salary^{vii} and yet outcomes from supervision result in greater professional accountability, skill and knowledge development, and greater support, leading to improved workplace retention.^{viii}

Summary

In summary, investment in nursing leadership structures is likely to result in significant cost savings through a stable nursing workforce, decreased adverse events, and improved productivity. Investment in nurse leadership structures is essential to ensure a quality health care system in New Zealand and should be made a policy priority.

References

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Mission statement

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NZNO embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi and works to improve the health status of all peoples of

Aotearoa/ New Zealand through participation in health and social policy development.

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