IONL Position Statement
Role of Nurse Leader

Background:

The Illinois Organization of Nurse Leaders (IONL) provides direction for achievement of excellence in nursing leadership. It promotes professional development, networking, research and innovation for the advancement of nursing practice. IONL encourages development of care delivery systems that are forthright and visionary. The IONL develops strategic initiatives in the area of executive management expertise in health care systems.

The mission and work of IONL is focused on engaging and advancing Illinois nurse leaders. IONL has identified a laser-sharp organizational vision dedicated to influencing health care through the advancement of nursing leadership.

Much like our parent organization, the American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE), IONL is continually engaged in environmental scanning and proactively defines vital strategic platforms and issues on which to take a stand and boldly promotes these to influence achievement of excellence in nursing leadership.

The Issue:

Today’s nurse leaders practice in very complex environments and face a constant barrage of challenges including budget reductions, changing reimbursement patterns, staffing demands, increasing expectations for high-quality outcomes and rapidly evolving technological advances. The role, voice and influence of the nurse leader have never been more essential than in today’s ever-changing and chaotic world of health care delivery.

In order to fully appreciate the scope and expectations of the nurse leader, we first must delineate the role utilizing an evidence-based approach. Leadership is defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.1 The primary goal of any nurse leader is to provide an optimal environment for excellent patient outcomes. Quality leadership is often described as professional, visionary, and inspirational while providing an optimal work environment to meet high clinical standards.2 Ultimately, being a great nurse leader is all about supporting staff so that they can provide exceptional patient care.

The Nursing Organizations Alliance (NOA) identified the nurse leader as being paramount in a healthful practice/work environment. As outlined in the NOA Principles and Elements of a Healthful Practice/Work Environment document, the presence of expert, competent, credible, visible leadership serves to advocate for nursing practice; supports shared decision-making; and allocates resources to support nursing.3 In keeping with its mission to shape health care through innovative and expert nursing leadership, the AONE Board of Directors has endorsed NOA’s paper.
Position Statement:

Given the current health care environment as well as anticipating our preferred future state, IONL believes the following is fundamental and indispensable concerning the role nurse leader:

- Articulating a clear view of the preferred future, resulting from global analysis, in order to lead other people and the organization to this desired or preferred future. Effective communication by the leader as well as trust and confidence in leaders are the most reliable predictors of employee engagement and satisfaction in an organization.⁴

- Creating and sustaining cultures that support clinicians to do their best work. Be skilled communicators, team builders, agents for positive change, committed to service, results oriented and role models for collaborative practice.⁵

- Being visible and constantly communicating with the workforce, the reality and magnitude of change, the plan for transition and opportunities that exist for them.⁶

- Assess, manage and develop oneself in order to preserve and optimize relationships and add value to the outcomes of one's organization. This requires skill in the core competencies of self-knowledge, strategic vision, risk-taking and creativity, interpersonal and communication effectiveness and inspiration.⁷

- Unwavering commitment to innovate and transform the work of professional nursing and the courage to move from "working within a framework" (transactional leader) to one of "working to change the framework" (transformational leader).⁸

Call to Action:

With more than 3 million registered nurses, the nursing profession is the largest segment of the nation’s health care workforce. Nurses at all levels - direct care bedside nurses, advanced practice nurses, management, staff development specialists, academic nursing faculty, nurse researchers and nurses in other support roles such as informatics - will each play a vital role in helping realize the objectives set forth in the 2010 Affordable Care Act.

In October 2010, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released its landmark report entitled *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* advocating that nurses should be full partners with physicians and other health professionals, in redesigning health care in the United States. The report indicates that although the public is not used to viewing nurses as leaders, and not all nurses begin their careers with thoughts of becoming a leader, it is unequivocal in the belief that all nurses be engaged as leaders in the design, implementation and evaluation of in
well as advocacy for the ongoing reforms to the system that will be needed. The report goes on to say that all clinicians and providers play increasingly inter-dependent roles; and that problems no longer have simple or clear-cut solutions. In this new environment, the old style of leadership—where leaders give orders and expect them to be followed—is no longer relevant. Every nurse, at every level of the care continuum, not just those with the formal title of leader, will be expected to speak up, speak out and to be a leader.
References


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