

Concept Essay

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Despite the knowledge, skills, and abilities one obtains in the course of formal education for nursing degrees, nursing professionals, regardless of role or level of educational attainment, should always pursue the improvement and expansion of that knowledge, those skills, and those abilities. This may well be especially true for the clinical nurse leader (CNL) who leads an interdisciplinary team focused on improving patient care outcomes, which will be the focus of this paper in addition to a plan of preparation and a consideration of potential barriers.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

In order to be an effective team participant and leader the CNL needs certain knowledge, skills, and abilities. In addition to the critical skills required of a nurse, the CNL also needs a firm grasp of expert knowledge, clinical competence, cultural competency, ethics, metrics/informatics, the importance of evidence-based practice (EBP), technology, patient safety, and the legal implications of the job (Mannix, Wilkes, & Daly, 2013; Rankin, 2015; Stavrianopoulos, 2012). Each of these areas represents different aspects of the knowledge acquired in the course of formal education as well as critical knowledge needed for the skills and abilities needed by the CNL. They also represent critical aspects of the CNL's job as a nurse but also represent areas in which the CNL must model expertise for the nurses they lead.

In terms of skills, the CNL needs several. Of course, the CNL needs those clinical skills required to the job, both as a team participant and leader. But they also need management/leadership skills, collaborative skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, and case management skills (Mannix, Wilkes, & Daly, 2013; Rankin, 2015; Stavrianopoulos, 2012). Stavrianopoulos (2012) asserts that leadership "implies authority in the broadest sense of the word, is nonhierarchical and *not confined to a specific set of skills*,

attributes, or traits [emphasis added]" (p. 393). However, the CNL must combined skills from both nursing and leadership/management in order to be effective both as a team member and a leader, even when the CNL is not necessarily the leader.

There are several abilities which are necessary for a CNL to be truly effective. These include goal-setting, anticipating problems and developing anticipatory solutions, systematic thinking, acknowledging the values and contributions of their colleagues, a commitment to patient-centered care, active listening, effective communication, the ability to communicate meaningful and constructive feedback, the ability to motivate/inspire and empower others, establishment of the therapeutic relationship, supportive, and role modeling (Mannix, Wilkes, & Daly, 2013). Many of these abilities make for an effective, motivated, productive, and efficient employee in general; a CNL absolutely needs these abilities to contribute, cooperate, and collaborate as a member and/or leader of a team.

Preparation Plan

In order to be able to lead interdisciplinary teams to improve patient care outcomes, I recognize that I must acquire or cultivate the aforementioned knowledge, skills, and abilities. Clinical expertise/knowledge is acquired through a combination of formal training and practice, as are clinical skills. Management/leadership skills are, I believe, a combination of natural leadership ability combined with the deliberate application of proven management strategies. Therefore, I recognize the need to learn and apply such strategies when appropriate. I believe I have good decision-making and problem-solving skills, so it is critical to continue to apply those in order to challenge them to keep them sharp. With regard to the abilities, there is a great need to maintain and improve or enhance those abilities which I feel I already have, such as effective communication and active listening. I appreciate how all of this knowledge, these skills, and

these abilities work together to make someone effective. I also plan to take every feasible opportunity to expand my knowledge, add to my skill set, and enhance my abilities whenever possible through continuing education opportunities and other formal training opportunities.

Potential Barriers

It is easy to plan the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities and to acknowledge their importance. However, as the saying goes, easier said than done. A potential barrier to the acquisition of these critical elements is a lack of convenient or affordable opportunities for continuing education and training. To mitigate this barrier, it is incumbent upon me to seek out local opportunities and to take advantage of the resources and opportunities afforded by membership in nationally-recognized professional organizations. I also recognize that sometimes my job might get in the way of my job, so to speak – that is, the daily demands of simply being a nurse may not offer me time or opportunity to cultivate certain skills or abilities. To mitigate this barrier, it is incumbent upon me to carve out time whenever possible to practice or employ those skills and abilities which it is clear need enhancement or improvement. I must also remember that a “clinical leader is both a member and a leader of a care team” (Fealy et al., 2011, p. 2024). I recognize that in being a leader I might myself less able to be a team player; this can be a significant barrier given that a team leader is still a member of that team. It is therefore my responsibility to remember that I am part of something bigger and that everybody has a role to play, all of which are equally important in providing quality care and improving patient outcomes. It is only through the concerted efforts of every member of the team. Fealy et al. (2011) note that leadership “must permeate through teams of clinicians to the level of the functional team” (p. 2024). I must remember that all team members will contribute and lead in their own ways. That will require mindfulness and deliberate consideration on my part.

References

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