Nurse Manager Education Degree Effect on Staff Nurse Satisfaction and Retention

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# Abstract

Effective leadership characteristics have long been identified as significant contributors to staff nurse job satisfaction. Staff nurse job satisfaction has been well documented as having a direct effect on retention and so, leadership style does have a direct impact on staff nurse retention rates. Understanding the relationship between graduate education and the higher frequency and quality of leadership characteristics suggests graduate education may contribute to the development of more effective leadership characteristics. Leadership training and graduate education must be examined from a comparative approach to determine how best to prepare nursing leaders. The objective of this study will be to evaluate the level of staff nurse satisfaction of the nurse manager, specifically as it pertains to managers prepared at the Baccalaureate and Masters levels. A random sample of registered nurses will be obtained from a 525 bed acute care hospital system and subjects will complete an on-line questionnaire to determine the level of satisfaction with their nurse manager’s leadership characteristics. These questionnaires will be statistically analyzed to determine a correlation between staff nurse manager satisfaction and education preparation of the manager.

# Statement and Significance of the Problem

Healthcare systems are experiencing transitions that include how care is delivered, shifts in the technology that creates change in the process of healthcare, unstable payment models, an intergenerational workforce, and a work force shortage. These changing trends are resulting in organizational complexity, instability, and uncertainty that must be internally managed by nurses as executives, managers, and practitioners. By virtue of their position, front-line nurse managers (NMs) provide the interface between executives and bedside nurses and thus are particularly important in managing these transitions. Nurse managers have multiple and competing demands that they must balance in defining, prioritizing, and implementing their role responsibilities to meet the expectations of the staff that they serve, the goals of the organization, and those of the profession. Nurse Managers are both challenged with and burdened by bridging these interests.

Nurse retention has become a workplace priority in hospitals. A recent study reported the cost to replace one nurse as high as $65,000 (Wieck, Dols & Landrum, 2010). The current workforce continues to be challenged by shortages, competency issues, safety concerns and image problems. One third of Millennial generation nurses plan to leave their job within the next two years, and over two thirds plan to be gone within the next five years (Wieck, Dols & Landrum, 2010). As the nursing workforce diminishes it becomes clear that nurse leaders must focus their efforts towards retaining the workforce at hand. Lu et al (Lu, Lin & Wu, 2002) provided impressive evidence that job satisfaction is positively associated with professional commitment and negatively associated with intent to leave.

Effective leadership characteristics, such as providing open discussion, considering the ideas of others, being available, maintaining high performance standards, and promoting strong employee relationships have been identified as significant contributors to staff nurse satisfaction (Heuston & Wolf, 2011). A recent study found that nurse managers identified a number of broad roles that are essential to the complex delivery of care in an acute care setting, but these roles were not learned in any cohesive and organized fashion as they moved from novice to expert nurse manager. Recognizing that on-the-job training is insufficient to prepare a nurse leader, the study concluded that more focus need to be placed on providing programs, such as an advanced nursing degree, that would support the novice nurse manager in developing outstanding leadership characteristics (Anthony, Standing, Glick & Et, 2005). The purpose of this study will be to compare the staff nurse satisfaction levels on units with Baccalaureate prepared nurse managers and Masters prepared nurse managers, knowing that satisfaction with the nurse leader has a direct impact on retention.

Literature Review

Three concepts were considered during the review of the literature. Does positive staff nurse job satisfaction directly correlate to improved retention? Does leadership style and nurse manager characteristics influence staff nurse satisfaction? Does educational preparation have an impact on leadership characteristics? In reviewing the literature, several studies were identified that measure staff nurse satisfaction and its correlation to retention. Positive practice environments that include adequate staffing, organizational support, and satisfaction with supervisor have been identified as key elements in staff retention (Trinkoff, Johantgen, Storr & Han, 2010). Lu et al stated that job satisfaction was associated with lower anticipated turnover and predictors of anticipated turnover included; lower job satisfaction, required weekend overtime, job stress, and lack of group cohesion (Lu, Lin & Wu, 2002). One study concluded that a low level of job satisfaction was the most significant predictor of a nurse’s intent to leave his/her current job (Ma, Yang & Chang, 2009). Trinkoff (2010) demonstrated that various factors contribute to nursing vacancies and turnover, including unsupportive practice environment, long work hours, and excessive physical and psychological demands. Along with the above study (Trinkoff, Johantgen, Storr & Han, 2010), many other studies demonstrate the direct correlation between job satisfaction and retention (Sherman & Bishop, 2007; Ferlise & Baggot, 2009; Kovner, Brewer, Wu, Cheng & Suzuki, 2006; Lacey, Cox & Lorfing, 2007).

The next concept researched during the literature review is the link between leadership style & nurse manager characteristics and staff nurse satisfaction. Our younger generational workforce is described as wanting a manager who attends to their personal needs, nurtures and supports them, provides a motivating environment, and has good “people skills” (Wieck, Dols & Landrum, 2010). In a comprehensive study funded by both the National Institute for Nursing Research and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Aiken et al surveyed more than 10,000 nurses in more than 300 hospitals and compelling evidence was found that organizational and managerial support was strongly related to staff nurse satisfaction and retention (Aiken & Clarke, 2002). One study also notes that characteristics of successful managerial behaviors and leadership styles include communication, advocating for nurses, providing a supportive organizational culture, autonomous practice environment, , scheduling and staffing, continuing education , and collaborative relationships (Anthony, Standing, Glick & Et, 2005). Staff nurses perceive themselves to be empowered when their leaders provide purpose and meaning to their work, enhance decision making, and structure a positive work environment (Anthony, Standing, Glick & Et. al 2005). The young workforce desires to be led, not managed. Wieck et al assessed that staff nurses desire autonomy, education, and a professional atmosphere. They require a manager who values their participation on a team, and offers praise and gratitude sincerely and regularly (Wieck, Dols & Landrum, 2010). Many other studies demonstrated the link between desired leadership characteristics such as; visibility, communication, respect, empathy, and staff nurse satisfaction (Anderson & Manno, 2010; Verschueren & Milisen, 2008; Cummings et al., July,2008; Cummings et al., October,2008). Heuston concluded that an effective and successful frontline nurse manager is invaluable in the retention of a professional staff because nurses who are dis-satisfied with their manager are twice as likely to consider leaving their current position (Heuston & Wolf, 2011). These studies provide support to the beneficial role of the nurse manager, and the associated skill set required of one who is responsible for recruitment and retention at a unit level.

In light of the evidence that staff nurse satisfaction and retention are closely tied to leadership characteristics, how does a nurse manager go about acquiring the skill set needed to succeed? Does a Baccalaureate degree adequately prepare today’s nurse manager to face the demands of the position? BSN nurses are prized for their skills in critical thinking, leadership, case management, health promotion, and their ability to practice across a wide continuum of care. The BSN prepares the nurse for a broader scope of practice and provides the nurse with an understanding of the cultural, political, economic, and social issues that affect patients and influence healthcare delivery (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2011). In one study key roles were identified and include; staffing, retention, keeping staff “happy”, ensuring good patient outcomes, managing admissions, triage of beds, paperwork, assuring competencies, empowerment, and growth (Anthony, Standing, Glick & Et, 2005). Key roles were also identified for the nurse prepared at the Master’s level and include; expert application of evidenced-based practices, quality improvement methods, outcomes measurement, systems knowledge, and leadership skills (Gifford, Davies, Edwards, Griffin & Lybanon, 2007). Master’s program graduates possess broad knowledge and practice expertise that builds on entry-level competency. This preparation provides graduates with a fuller understanding of the discipline of nursing, which is necessary to engage in a higher level of practice and leadership roles (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2011).

Essential nurse leadership competencies now include enhanced skills in communication, conflict resolution, creating a vision, motivating and inspiring nurses, and fostering unit level evidence-based research protocol efforts. In light of the studies reviewed, it is clear that a link exists between staff nurse satisfaction and retention. The evidence is also clear that effective nurse leaders can enhance satisfaction and retention. Literature and research provide a differentiation in the key roles of the BSN and MSN prepared nurse leaders. After reviewing the evidence, I propose that further research is needed to evaluate whether a BSN adequately prepares today’s manager for the challenges they will face, or does the increased knowledge-base provided by a MSN translate into better staff nurse satisfaction and retention?

Research Question

The aim of this study will be to answer the following questions:

* What characteristics do staff nurses value in their nurse managers?
* Do differences in education preparation (BSN vs MSN) of nurse managers translate into different job satisfaction and retention outcomes among staff nurses?
* Is there a higher job satisfaction and retention level on units with Master’s prepared nurse managers?

The independent variables of interest are educational levels of nurse managers, Baccalaureate versus Master’s. All inpatient and outpatient units will be enrolled in the study. Data reported to Human Resources and NDNQI will provide the list of units to be included and their nurse manager’s education level. Another independent variable of interest will be what characteristics staff nurses value in their manager. This will be measured using the Magnet Nurse Opinion Survey (American Nurses Credentialing Center, 2008).

One dependent variable will be registered nurse’s satisfaction with their nurse manager. Staff nurse satisfaction will be measured using the Magnet Nurse Opinion Survey (American Nurses Credentialing Center, 2008). The other dependent variable that will be evaluated will be retention rates. Hospital Human Resources data will be compiled to compare retention rates between units with BSN prepared nurse managers and MSN prepared nurse managers.

Methodology

*Study* Setting

This study will occur at a 525 bed acute care hospital system in New York State. The hospital is a teaching institution affiliated with an LPN program, Associate’s degree in Nursing Program, and an AACN accredited Nursing University with BSN, MSN, and PhD programs. The patient population is representative of all age groups and ethnicities. Acuity levels that will be included in the study will be all inpatient and outpatient units providing direct patient care. Hospital nurse manager position requirements include all nurse mangers must hold a BSN.

*Research Design*

A quantitative correlation research design will be used, gathering information from subjects, registered nurses, and correlating their responses with the level of education preparation of their manager. A correlational research design is appropriate for the purpose of this study, as it determines a positive or negative relationship between the variables. The study design will be presented to the hospital’s Research Council and then to the Internal Review Board for approval.

*Sampling*

A random sample will be utilized. The hospital system has 850 registered nurses employed in acute care inpatient and outpatient units. Nurse will be invited to voluntarily complete the survey. Inclusion criteria will include all registered nurses with six months or more of experience currently employed in an inpatient or outpatient direct patient care unit. Demographic characteristics surveyed will include; gender, age, ethnicity, education preparation, years employed by hospital, full vs part time status. Although questionnaires will include demographic characteristics of registered nurses, this data will be gathered for statistical purposes only and will not determine exclusion or inclusion in the study.

*Data Collection*

A computer based hospital intranet will be used for the registered nurse to access the questionnaire. The ANCC Magnet Nurse Opinion Survey will be utilized. The term “nurse manager” will be used to encompass leaders in front-line leadership roles. Invitations for participation will be sent through hospital posters, flyers, with paychecks, and other media posted in the hospital. Restaurant gift cards will be randomly raffled off as incentive for completion. The survey will assure anonymity. Data will be collected over a two month period. Retention statistics will be collected for each unit from the Human Resources Department.

*Data Analysis*

Using subject’s responses to questionnaires, a relationship will be determined between staff nurse satisfaction and retention, and the nurse manager’s education level. Statistical analysis will be used to determine the strength of relationships among the variables.

*Strengths and Weaknesses*

Including only registered nurses who have at least six months of experience on their unit will eliminate those registered nurses that have not had adequate time to evaluate the leadership characteristics of their manager. As long as enough registered nurses respond to the questionnaire, an adequate sample size should be obtained, and the research findings may be interpreted with an adequate degree of confidence. All data is self-reported and this may bias study findings. The desire of a subject to respond may correlate with the subject’s job satisfaction or job performance, which would muddle results.

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