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Safety in leadership: Whose role is it?

Joyce Hendricks
Edith Cowan University, Australia

Abstract

Background: The success of an organization's safety program is directly related to the focus and diligence of its leaders to provide a culture of patient safety and safe care delivery. The leadership of a health system encompasses a diverse group of mutually dependent stakeholders each of whom has a vested interest and contribution to the overall safety of the organization. An effective quality and continuous improvement program requires will, commitment, and the thoughtful and persistent implementation of behaviors, methods, and processes which should be reflected in the professional repertoire of nurse leaders. The need for safety leadership requires the preparation of nurses to influence the patient safety and safe practice agenda through the development of leadership capabilities via the efficacy of a leadership program and leadership training within education. The inherent high risk of healthcare delivery and the recognition and acknowledgement that our present practices and culture can and does impact on the safety of patients should be foremost in the values of potential nursing leaders. Understanding and accepting this fact is an essential first step in their education and transition to the role of leader within healthcare organizations so that they adapt their behavior and make the necessary changes needed to minimize the risk of harm to patients. However, is this reflected in their contemplation of leadership and its concern with patient safety?

Aims: To determine the extent to which potential nurse leaders enrolled in a leadership program of education at one university in Australia see patient risk and safety as part of their leadership role.

Methods: A mixed method descriptive design was used to elucidate the extent to which postgraduate students recognize patient risk and safety as a leadership function.

Analysis and results: Descriptive statistics and content analysis was used to analyze data around the key words of patient safety, patient risk, and continuous improvement. This paper presents the results of the analysis of postgraduate nursing student's responses to what is leadership? And their role as leaders. Potential nurse leaders in this cohort are disassociated from their role of continuous improvement and see this role as a separate entity that is someone else's concern. Patient safety and risk whilst acknowledged is secondary to concerns over workplace disharmony, lack of staff and the day to day operations of staffing a healthcare system. The role of clinical governance is given scant mention in the role of nursing leadership and shared responsibility for patient safety and risk is not mentioned.

Recommendations: That potential nurse leader are required to demonstrate knowledge and skill in the tenets of clinical governance and that key performance indicators are attached to all senior clinical positions to demonstrate active involvement in continuous improvement and the management of patient risk and safety. Further, that nurse educators emphasize the professional concern that nursing leaders should espouse for patient cantered care and safety and the accountability for each individual and the shared responsibility they have for minimizing harm within the changing healthcare system.

Biography

Dr. Joyce Hendricks teaches in the post graduate and undergraduate courses at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. Joyce supervises students at honors', master and PHD level. Her research interests include leadership, generational diversity, education and nursing. Joyce has a strong educational and clinical focus and was the recipient of a 2011 Australian Leaning & Teaching Citation and was recognized for recognition of her role in developing a leadership program that improves the student experience through engaging and motivating industry-based projects. She is also the recipient of the 2011 ECU Vice Chancellors Award for Leaning & Teaching. Joyce is a member of Royal College of Nurs.ing (Australia), Sigma Theta Tau Incorporated, and Australian Nurse Teachers Association.

j.hendricks@ecu.edu.au