



Achieving Excellence In Leadership

Nurse leaders, who may be short on management training, can develop self-improvement plans by attending full-day workshops.

DIRECTORS OF NURSING (DONS) and other senior nurse leaders in the long term care environment face enormous responsibilities—both clinical and managerial—and they often face these challenges in relative isolation. While issues of regulatory compliance and survey deficiencies often appear paramount, the underlying dynamic of leadership and management proficiency is frequently overlooked. Programs may be implemented to address survey citations, for example, but sustaining compliance and quality over the long haul is a far more accurate measure of leadership.

Today's overriding emphasis on quality standards requires nurse leaders to succeed on a broad variety of fronts—a process that requires a true assessment of their strengths and weaknesses and a strong desire to improve.

The Radiating Excellence Nurse Leadership Self-Assessment system—spearheaded by the American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living—provides nurse leaders with precisely the tools they need to gauge their current leadership competency levels and develop a personalized plan to move on to the next plateau. It also helps nurse leaders to better understand the full scope of their profession by defining what constitutes “excellence” in a constantly changing field. In a general sense, Radiating Excellence provides four primary benefits, including:

- Improved performance;
- Increased competency and preparation to rise to a higher leadership role;

- Increased awareness of the multiple roles played by the nurse leader; and
- Better insight into the many facets of each role.

How The System Works

The Radiating Excellence system defines the scope of nurse leadership in terms of seven roles, each containing a full spectrum of key relationships—administrators, peers, direct reports, frontline staff, patients, and families—that must be mastered to meet the goals of the program. Within each of the seven roles, specific competencies define the behaviors—actions, skills—that demonstrate competence.

The seven roles are leader, performance improvement catalyst, interpersonal relations facilitator, human resources developer, resource and finance manager, standards and compliance expert resource, and customer service advocate.

The self-assessment system itself is comprised of 14 separate but interrelated assessment scales. Each scale consists of a clear description of the critical skills being assessed, examples of objective data that illustrate performance, and a list of the primary and secondary competencies that demonstrate required proficiencies.

The 14 assessment scales include: 1.) living mission and values; 2.) modeling effective leadership; 3.) modeling supervisory skills; 4.) ensuring optimum care standards; 5.) attracting and retaining staff; 6.) developing staff; 7.) championing quality improvement; 8.) integrating risk management; 9.)

exhibiting regulatory expertise; 10.) managing resources; 11.) communicating effectively; 12.) facilitating change; 13.) managing conflict; and 14.) advocating customer satisfaction.

Each of the 14 scales includes a description of the qualities that embody excellence in that particular category. Under No. 2 (modeling effective leadership), for example, the description explains that:

■ Visionary leadership is central to the effectiveness of the exceptional nurse leader (ENL). This strong, effective leadership is demonstrated through personal behavior that reflects integrity and credibility in all relationships, openness to new ideas, and a commitment to lifelong learning and development.

■ The ENL demonstrates integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness in the execution of his/her responsibilities. He/she inspires trust and confidence through modeling excellence, a commitment to quality, and a respect for the beliefs, values, and customs of individuals. He/she maintains a clear vision of the organization's mission and is able to communicate this vision in a way that inspires others.

■ The ENL reinforces positive thinking and positive outcomes by actively generating new ideas and

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changes as appropriate, encouraging others to take calculated risks in decision making, and demonstrating flexibility and openness to new ideas and paradigms. He/she functions as facility liaison with community professionals and leaders, improving the community perception of the facility's image

through an effective public relations program while providing coordinated client care.

■ The ENL champions lifelong personal and professional learning by systematically assessing his/her own need for personal and professional education, availing him/herself of a variety

of growth and self-improvement opportunities. He/she uses various strategies to improve, such as continuing education, professional credentialing, collaboration with other community organizations, public speaking, research, marketing, and networking.

Nurses Assess Their Skills

Using examples of data illustrating performance in each particular category (including "participation in continuing education seminars" and "ways in which the ENL is an initiator/leader" in the sample category, for instance) and a list of relevant competencies to rank their own actual leadership experience and performance, the nurse leaders determine their current levels of performance on each of the assessment scales and match them with one of five profiles provided for that category. The profiles, which are listed on a scale of A through E, are not ranked in any special order to reinforce participant objectivity. The nurse leaders must decide which profile most describes them.

For example, under the heading "modeling effective leadership" again, the five profiles include:

A. Demonstrates a desire for quality and is perceived as trustworthy; shows awareness of the importance of community perceptions and is open to new ideas; and develops leadership skills through readily available sources, collaborating at times with other organizations.

B. Models commitment to quality and a clear vision of the organization's goals; seeks new ideas and understands the importance of an effective public relations program; and participates in a variety of professional development opportunities.

C. Inspires confidence through visionary leadership that reflects credibility, integrity, and respect for others; enthusiastically reinforces positive outcomes and a positive facility image through community involvement; and actively seeks professional development

opportunities, including professional credentialing.

D. Performs daily work with little awareness of the effect of personal behavior on others; makes changes only as needed, demonstrating limited understanding of public relations issues; and participates in professional development opportunities as directed.

E. Demonstrates a disregard for integrity and respect for others; encourages the status quo, unreceptive to most new ideas and disregards feedback from the community; and lacks awareness of need for continuing professional growth and development.

Resulting Feedback

Nurse leaders then complete this process for each of the 14 scales. A chart shows participants how they ranked on a scale of 5 (optimum) to 1 in each category, providing them with a profile of their current individual level of leadership performance across the scales.

The resulting profiles provide immediate feedback, graphically illustrating and validating areas of strong performance, and afford nurse leaders momentum to undertake improvement in areas where their performance needs strengthening.

Once the nurses complete the self-assessment profile, facilitators assist them in developing individual self-improvement plans with goals that are SMART (simple, measurable, achiev-

able, realistic, and timely). The knowledge and understanding gained in the self-assessment process leads directly to development of the self-improvement plan.

The Radiating Excellence system provides senior nurse leaders a road map to knowledge, skills, and behav-

iors that define excellent performance. The initiative to engage in self-assessment and follow-through leads to increased self-confidence and job satisfaction. As such, it is equally valuable for those nurse leaders newly advancing and those with significant experience and tenure. ■

For More Information

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■ “Radiating Excellence” workshops are being given across the country by 14 trained facilitators—including the authors. For more information on taking or sponsoring a workshop, log on to www.ahca.org.