

Original Article

Implications of Mentoring on Work Performance of Inexperienced Charge Nurses

Annie Namathanga, PhD (c)

Researcher, Kamuzu University of Health Sciences, Private Bag 1, Mzimba Street, Lilongwe Malawi

Wilson J.O Odiyo, PhD

Senior Lecturer, Pan Africa Christian University, P.O. Box 56875, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya

Caren A. Ouma, PhD

Professor, Pan Africa Christian University, P.O. Box 56875, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya

Correspondence: Namathanga Annie, Kamuzu University of Health Sciences, Private Bag 1, Mzimba Street, Lilongwe, Malawi e-mail: anamathanga@kuhes.ac.mw

Abstract

Background: Nurses with inadequate clinical experience assume the position of a ward or unit in charge due to a shortage of professional nurses in Malawian hospitals. Senior nurse leaders are expected to take on the responsibility of mentoring the novice charge nurses. Nonetheless, years of work experience allow a nurse to develop the necessary abilities, knowledge, and attitudes to be a successful leader. This article presents some of the qualitative findings from a wider convergent mixed-method study that investigated the impact of supportive leadership on the work performance of inexperienced charge nurses.

Aim: This part of the study aimed to explore the implications of senior nurse leaders' mentoring on the work performance of inexperienced charge nurses with less than two years of clinical experience.

Methods: The sample comprised senior and inexperienced charge nurses and was selected through purposive sampling. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty nurses: ten seniors and ten inexperienced in-charges. The collected data was analysed thematically. Ethical permission for the research was granted by the National Commission for Science and Technology in Malawi.

Results: Through mentoring, inexperienced charge nurses were able to assume leadership roles in hospital wards and units. However, the mentoring was conducted inconsistently. Administrative responsibilities for senior nurse leaders hampered comprehensive mentoring. A shortage of staff also compromised senior nurses' efforts at mentoring. Furthermore, none of the hospitals in the study had a formal mentorship tool.

Conclusion: The results revealed the value of senior nurse leaders' mentoring in enabling inexperienced charge nurses to oversee hospital wards and units. However, to improve implementation and consistency, a mentoring tool needs to be developed. Hospital management must address the shortage of nurses, which prevents senior nurse leaders from offering comprehensive mentoring.

Keywords: Charge Nurse; Mentoring; Nursing Leadership; Senior Nurse Leader; Work Performance

Introduction

Nurses with inadequate clinical experience often take on the position of ward or unit in charge due to a shortage of professional nurses in Malawi. According to statistics from the Ministry of Health, the country has a 40% vacancy rate for nurses (Ministry of Health, 2023). It is presumed that senior nurse leaders

in hospitals across the country provide mentoring to the novice charge nurses.

Mentoring is a crucial aspect of effective leadership. It is a developmental and learning relationship between an expert and a less experienced person in a specified field or profession (Alexander *et al.*, 2022; Armstrong, 2023). The mentee benefits from the expertise,

skills, and knowledge received from the mentor, which fosters personal and professional growth and enhances work performance. Mentoring is essential in nursing practice. It is a tool used to socialize student nurses into the nursing profession and for continuous professional growth and development (Foolchand and Maritz, 2020; Hoover *et al.*, 2020). Mentoring is also crucial in the development of clinical nurse leaders, as it facilitates a smooth transition to nurse leadership (Sullivan, 2017; Yarbrough and Phillips, 2022).

This study aimed to explore the implications of senior nurse leaders' mentoring on the work performance of inexperienced charge nurses who had less than two years of clinical work experience. The research questions were:

1. How do senior nurse leaders mentor inexperienced charge nurses in clinical practice?
2. How does mentoring affect the work performance of inexperienced charge nurses?
3. What factors impact the mentoring provided to novice charge nurses?

Methods

The research used a narrative qualitative design. The study included senior nurse leaders and inexperienced charge nurses with less than two years of clinical experience from Malawi's Central West Quality Satellite Zone Hospitals. Ten senior nurse leaders and ten inexperienced charge nurses were selected from general, pediatric, and labour wards, using purposive sampling. In-depth interviews were conducted and recorded with all participants. The data were analysed using Colaizzi's seven-step thematic method (Wirihana *et al.*, 2018; Bryman, 2021). The National Commission for Science and Technology in Malawi granted ethical approval, Protocol No. P.12/22/705. 99

Results

Data analysis revealed two main themes: mentoring practices and the impact of mentoring on work performance.

Mentoring Practices

Senior nurse leaders explained how inexperienced charge nurses were introduced and mentored into nursing leadership. The seniors reported on the orientation given to the novice charge nurses and their work collaboration. Orientation provides a new employee or leader with an overview of an organization, its culture, and their role (Wang, 2022). An effective work orientation promotes employee connection and comfort in an organization.

When I receive an inexperienced charge nurse in our department, I first plan a meeting to familiarize them with the ward and their responsibilities as ward in-charge. We work together for a week or longer after orientation (SNL 10).

The demanding and challenging clinical work environment necessitated the orientation of inexperienced charge nurses by senior nurses.

When a nursing officer joins our department, one of the first things they are given is an overview of our unit, the duties they will perform, and the rules and regulations they must follow (SNL 08).

Inexperienced charge nurses received orientation on leadership responsibilities, daily work schedules, and work policies and procedures. After orientation, some senior nurses left the charge nurses to manage the wards, while others took the initiative to work with them for a week or longer.

I provide orientation to the new nurse in charge before allowing them to work autonomously. When I notice something is wrong, I come in and talk to the person. (SNL 05).

The findings demonstrated that administrative responsibilities and increased workloads prevented many senior nurses from effectively mentoring inexperienced charge nurses, despite their intention to do so.

I don't have enough time to mentor a new charge nurse. I have additional administrative responsibilities in the department (SNL 04).

Similarly, a senior nurse said:

Sometimes I come to the ward with the intention of working with and mentoring a charge nurse. However, due to an increasing workload, I end up conducting births just like any other nurse in the labour ward (SNL 09).

Literature affirms that time limits and workload of mentors are among the impediments to mentoring (Talbert *et al.*, 2021; Wissemann *et al.*, 2022). Some senior nurses were dissatisfied that there was no formal tool available to assist them in the mentoring process. None of the hospitals had an official nursing leadership mentoring tool.

I wish the hospital had a mentoring tool. Otherwise, we do not give standardized mentoring to the novice charge nurses (SNL 010).

Another senior nurse commented:

We don't have a formal mentorship guide or protocol. I mentor ward in-charges based on their job descriptions and desired performance (SNL 05).

When mentors have defined mentoring criteria or an instrument, the process is standardised and often successful. (Taylor, McKinlay and Morris, 2017; Beauchemin, Cohn and Shelton, 2019).

Inexperienced charge nurses expressed varying opinions on their work collaboration with senior nurse leaders.

"I did not receive one-on-one mentoring, but I was told to contact the senior nurse if I needed assistance" (ICN 08).

Some charge nurses viewed what senior nurses were doing as supervision rather than mentorship. Mentoring focuses on an individual's long-term development from a comprehensive perspective (Ntho, Pienaar and Sehularo, 2020; Koh *et al.*, 2023).

Most of the time, senior nurses come to supervise. I don't remember receiving their

mentoring. They frequently visit the ward and observe how I work (ICN 09).

The inexperienced charge nurses had similar perspectives on the behaviour of senior nurses.

The senior nurses do not work with us; instead, they supervise. They always want to know who is on duty, what tasks are assigned, and whether we're executing our responsibilities (ICN 02).

Other senior nurse leaders reported mentoring inexperienced charge nurses through delegation. Delegation is the process of granting someone the authority to act on behalf of another person (Zhang *et al.*, 2017).

I occasionally assign work to a novice charge nurse that I am mentoring. I can send the nurse to a meeting on my behalf (SNL 07).

Another senior nurse concurred:

I delegate authority to a new charge nurse. It helps the nurse feel more confident in her leadership abilities. I also give feedback to let the nurse know how she is performing (SNL 06).

Leadership skills can be developed and enhanced through delegation (Wagner, 2018; Beckett *et al.*, 2021). Before assigning a task, a senior leader must examine whether it would advance the development or enhance the competencies of a new leader. The senior leader is also expected to provide feedback after the job is completed.

The inexperienced charge nurses were introduced to policies and other essential documents that guided the management of wards and units.

Our department has set goals and standard operating procedures to promote teamwork. These regulations are shared and explained to all new charge nurse leaders (SNL 07).

Written guidelines enable healthcare professionals to conduct some clinical tasks without consultation or prescription (Wangler and Jansky, 2021). Additionally, protocols

strengthen clinical management and leadership, as well as standardize healthcare delivery.

We collaborate with other healthcare professionals, including physicians, clinical officers, dieticians, and support personnel. Our clinical goals and standard protocols all contribute to improved collaboration (SNL 08).

Charge nurses are expected to be knowledgeable of the documents that guide their leadership and management (Foolchand and Maritz, 2020). Efficient leaders set examples for their subordinates by following the prescribed guidelines and protocols (Pereira *et al.*, 2022).

Impact of Mentoring on Work Performance

Both Senior and inexperienced charge nurses agreed that mentoring facilitated the acquisition of leadership knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. Mentors and mentees have employed mentorship as a traditional teaching approach to transfer information and skills for centuries (Dimitropoulos, 2017; Madlabana, Mashamba-Thompson and Petersen, 2020; Dirks, 2021).

The new charge nurses I have mentored competently take up allocated leadership tasks and display self-confidence (SNL 010).

Inexperienced charge nurses recognized the significance of mentoring but lamented that not all senior nurses offered mentoring.

The majority of the seniors are not available on the wards, and they are not hands-on. When there is a staffing deficit, they don't even come to help (ICN, 03).

On the other side, the novice charge nurses acknowledged the useful information shared by the senior nurses during orientation. They knew who to contact when leadership support was required.

Receiving orientation about leadership roles and responsibilities is useful because it provides direction and a sense of where to begin. If I am stranded, I know I have my seniors for support (ICN 08).

Another charge nurse said:

Our seniors are not always present in the wards, but they mostly come when we require their assistance. Some clinical issues are hard, and sometimes you don't know what to do as a ward in-charge (ICN 02).

An effective nurse leader should be accessible and approachable (Mrayyan *et al.*, 2023). The leader is expected to inspire change, provide guidance, and offer advice as needed.

Discussion

The study assessed the impact of senior nursing leaders' mentoring on the work performance of new charge nurses with less than two years of experience in Malawian hospitals.

The findings revealed that not all senior nurses mentored inexperienced charge nurses; however, induction and supervision were done. Nonetheless, studies affirm that mentoring has a beneficial impact on employee performance.

Mentoring enables both mentees and mentors to reach their full potential while strengthening their leadership skills (Bitner, 2019; Feyissa, Balabanova and Woldie, 2019; Uwisanze *et al.*, 2021). Mentorship can be utilized for professional growth, development, and socialization for both qualified and student nurses (Hoover *et al.*, 2020; Alexander *et al.*, 2022).

In addition, effective mentoring occurs when there is a tool or a set of precise rules to standardize the process (Taylor, McKinlay and Morris, 2017; Beauchemin, Cohn and Shelton, 2019). Regrettably, none of the institutions where the research was conducted had a mentoring tool for nursing leadership.

Administrative responsibilities also made it difficult for many senior nurses to mentor the novice charge nurses. Research reveals that time constraints, staff and resource shortages, workload, and a lack of support are the obstacles to mentoring (Talbert *et al.*, 2021; Xu *et al.*, 2021; Gong, Van Swol, and Wang, 2022).

Limitations: The findings revealed the impact of mentoring on the work performance of novice charge nurses in Malawian hospitals.

They highlight details about nursing leadership, mentoring, and the existing gaps. Nonetheless, larger-scale research employing mixed methods can be conducted in all five quality satellite zones to achieve an exhaustive understanding of the implications of mentorship on novice charge nurses' performance.

Conclusion: Mentoring is essential for socialisation, professional development, and growth in nursing practice. Nurses are mostly mentored by their seniors, fellow nurses, and other healthcare professionals. Mentoring enhances clinical skills, leadership, and managerial abilities, and it also impacts patients' outcomes. Novice charge nurses require ongoing, thorough mentoring to lead and manage hospital wards and units.

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