Clinical Question: “What evidence-based education structures and processes offer essential learning opportunities that acute care staff nurses need to experience professional growth and development?”

Background: Nurses must take greater responsibility for themselves and their careers in order to grow professionally, provide optimal nursing care, and to prepare for ever-changing healthcare systems and workplace environments.2, 6, 7 Career development programs have the ability to play an important role in improving nurses’ professional skills and sense of contribution to an organization. 2,3,4,5,8,9 Few studies have examined what hospital programs are offered that respond to and satisfy nurse career needs.3 In addition, extensive examination regarding the career needs of nurses during varying stages has not been undertaken.3 Professional staff development appears to provide benefits to both the nursing staff and the organization.2,3,4,5,8,9 Directly linking Professional Practice Models (PPMs) with performance expectations ensures that underlying organizational principles are supported and evident in everyday practice.8, 9 A review of the current literature was conducted to determine the educational structures and processes that support these models and programs. The structures and processes can then be utilized as framework for essential learning opportunities staff nurses need to develop and grow professionally.

Discussion: The literature presented several organizational structures and processes that culminate in a staff nurses’ professional development and advancement.1 These structures and processes can provide a visible organizational commitment to staff professional growth and development. Ultimate outcomes include accountability of staff for their own professional growth, employee retention, increased staff satisfaction, and an adequate pool of qualified internal candidates when vacancies in leadership positions occur.2,3,4,5,8,9,10

Organizational Structures
* It is imperative that a supportive organizational culture be created to promote profession growth and development, with integration of the organization’s mission, vision, strategy, and PPM.1,2,4,5,6,8,9
* In order to facilitate engagement in organizational role development activities, leadership should provide support with flexible schedules, access to education, and tuition support. The availability of funds also includes continuing education, conference attendance, degree programs, and leadership advancement and/or development programs.1,2,5,8,9
* The use of existing models, frameworks, and tools include inclusion criteria, career maps, program manuals, role descriptions, career tracking, forms for enrollment/review, and professional roles along with a financial reward system will ensure a smooth process and productive environment where nurses can grow and develop professionally.1,3,4,6,8,9,10
* Several existing models incorporate the creation, implementation, and evaluation of a clinical advancement system,8 a professional development plan,3,4,5,9 and a succession plan.2,10
  - Open implementation of a clinical/career advancement system including a clinical track, education track, and management track provides opportunities for skills development and a sense of contribution.5,8

Organizational Processes
* Personalized professional growth and development involves creating, implementing, and evaluating professional development plans that are unique to each nurses’ career stage and educational preparation.3,4,5,9
* Mentorship was shown to be a major determinant of nurses’ participation in professional development and career advancement.1 Ongoing mentorship of self-efficacious nurses allows them to acquire leadership qualities that allow them to advance in their careers and become clinical leaders.1
  - Pair the nurse with a mentor and appraiser who periodically reviews and annually appraises the personalized professional development plan.3,4,5,9
* The identification of intrapersonal factors and extrapersonal factors is important when considering the professional growth and development of staff nurses.1 Intrapersonal factors appear to influence a nurse’s participation in professional development and career advancement, while extrapersonal factors facilitate a nurses’ engagement in professional development, career advancement, and leadership opportunities.
* Career planning and development programs workshops include a step-wise process that allows nurses to understand the organization’s vision and strategy and teaches them to take ownership of their professional growth and
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development. Activities involved in these program include scanning the healthcare environment, completing a self-assessment, creating a career vision of realistic short and long-term goals, and developing a strategic career plan that includes a component on self-marketing strategies.6

• Succession planning identifies projected human resource needs and develops potential candidates while promoting staff ownership of professional development. By committing time/financial resources to formal succession planning training and developmental assignments, an organization culture can be created that supports career advancement.2

**Limitations:** The quality of the evidence was limited by several factors. Only 10 articles fit the inclusion criteria (See Pages 9-12 for Search Methodology). No evidence was sourced from randomized control trials. The majority of the evidence stemmed from descriptive correlational studies 1, 2, 4, 10 and 1 literature review6 (See Page 13). One descriptive study commented that time available for nurses to participate in professional development programs is the greatest limitation due to the demands placed on nurses.4 Two of the descriptive studies mentioned that some processes are specific in their implementation and will require additional time and planning in order for them to be effectively implemented.8, 10 Only one reference outlined professional development barriers4 and the role of intra- and extra-personal factors.1 Lastly, two international study results may not be generalizable to the United States.3, 9

**Conclusions:** Overall, the evidence was consistent regarding the educational structures and processes involved in professional growth and development. Various models and programs exist that provide a blueprint for nursing to move toward identifying, designing, and implementing a career advancement structure within clinical practice.1,3,4,6,8 These structures then allow nurses prepared at higher levels of education and training to contribute, and articulate nursing’s role to high-quality health care among multi-disciplinary care teams.1, 2, 5-10 Although one model allows nurses who are prepared at higher levels of education and training to develop through a clinical career advancement structure,1 another model poses that the development of professional skills does not rely heavily on tenure or years of experience.5 In addition, program success was linked to: (a) building momentum within the individual nursing unit, (b) overall commitment to the process, and (c) the commitment of leadership to emphasize the importance of any model/tool and facilitate its use.4 Intra- and extra-personal factors as well as the concept of self-efficacy also contribute to professional growth and development.1 Barriers to professional development included night work, staff shortages, heavy workloads, personal commitments, and poorly defined concepts of nursing.4 A topic consistently discussed throughout the literature was nurse job satisfaction.3-5, 10 Although this topic was not the focus of this review, organizations should consider including nurse job satisfaction in discussions regarding professional growth and development. Increasing the opportunities for nurses to engage in professional development assists in increasing nurse retention2,4 and satisfaction3-5, 10 as well as the quality of care provided.4

**Recommendations:** Based on the reviewed evidence, the following recommendations are offered for consideration, as related to the essential structures and processes needed for professional development/career advancement programs:

- Create an organizational culture supportive of professional growth and development2,4,9 and includes leadership,1,8 financial,3,5,9 and Human Resources2,8 support.

- Use pre-existing models, frameworks, and tools to design, implement, evaluate, and monitor professional development and career enhancement programs.1,3,4,6,8 (See Appendices A, C, D, E, and F)
  - Embed the organizational mission, vision, and PPM into all programs.6,8

- Create a professional development coordinator to facilitate the development, implementation, and evaluation of professional development programs customized for the individual staff nurse.9

- Pair staff nurses with a mentor and professional development appraiser9 to assist in the creation of a professional development plan unique to each nurses’ career stage and educational preparation.3,4,5,9
  - Support nurses in assessing their professional development goals and create action plans to operationalize them.9

- Identify barriers and facilitators that potentially impact the success of professional development and career enhancement programs.4

- Discussions concerning nurse professional growth and development should also include nurse self-efficacy, intrapersonal factors, extrapersonal factors, and job satisfaction.1,3-5

Cinthya Vasquez, DNP, FNP-C and Cecelia L. Crawford, DNP, RN; ©Kaiser Permanente, SCAL Regional Nursing Research Program, November 2014
Evidence Summary

Programs/Models/Tools:

- **Professional Excellence and Career Advancement in Nursing (PECAN) Model**
  - Framework to examine factors that influence nurses’ participation in professional development and career advancement for leadership building
  - Blueprint for nursing to move toward identifying, designing, and implementing a clinical career advancement structure that allows nurses prepared at a higher level of education and training to practice, contribute, and articulate nursing’s role to high-quality health care among multi-disciplinary care teams
  - Proposes that self-efficacious nurses who receive mentoring are able to acquire leadership qualities, allowing them to advance in their careers to become clinical leaders

- **Career Advancement for Registered Nurse Excellence (CARE) Program**
  - Plays an important role in improving nurses’ professional skills and sense of contribution to the organization
  - Provides opportunity for the development of professional skills among staff nurses
  - Program tracks:
    - Clinical track
    - Education track
    - Management track
  - Does not rely heavily on tenure or years of experience (Note: Conflicting results; see Page 3, under Professional and Educational Preparedness)

- **Milestone Pathway Tool**
  - Designed to enhance professional development unique to individual nurse and specific nursing unit and provide a unit-specific concept map, a milestone pathway template, and a personal professional development plan
  - Maintained during the annual review
  - Unit specific and also personalized for each nurse

- **Career Planning and Development Program (CPDP)**
  - Developed to help nurses understand the organization’s vision and strategy
  - Learn how to take ownership for continued employability
  - Assisting the nurse to assess her/his skills, explore career possibilities inside the organization, and plan and achieve career goals
  - Appeals to nurses who are satisfied with other facets of their work, such as the amount of control and responsibility they have, interaction opportunities, praise and recognition received, and professional opportunities
  - Participants are given a resource package with various tools that they could refer to as they moved through the workshop and for future reference
  - A workshop is provided with the following components: (a) scanning the environment, (b) completing a self-assessment, (c) creating a career vision, and (d) developing a strategic career plan including a component on self-marketing strategies
  - Workshops to assist with resume preparation and individual career coaching
  - Assist nurses in developing career plan and ultimately contribute to nursing retention and organizational commitment
  - Provide nurses with resources required to prepare them as productive members of the healthcare organization
• **Professional Development Program/Plan (PDP)**\(^7,^9\)
  o Identify individual learning gaps, learning objectives and an agreed training program\(^9\)
  o Development should be approached in a supportive and professional manner in order to advance development and education and involves formal and informal learning activities that support nurses in their role in healthcare organizations\(^9\)
  o Needs to provide clear and transparent policies on staff development\(^9\)
  o Educational initiative developed to provide instruction and mentoring for poster and oral presentations, article publication, and professional portfolio development\(^7\)
  o Workshops included the following\(^7\):
    - “How to Develop a Professional Presentation”
    - “How to Develop a Poster Presentation”
    - “Writing for Publication: How to Get Started”
    - “Winning Resumes and Interviews”
    - “How to Develop a Portfolio”
    - “Continued Competence and the Professional Portfolio”
  o There was a “definite difference” between applicants who had attended the portfolio development class and those who had not, although this difference was not articulated\(^7\)

• **Linking a Professional Practice Model (PPM) with a Clinical Advancement System (CAS)**\(^8\)
  o A PPM is a schematic description of a system, theory, or phenomenon that depicts how nurses practice, collaborate, communicate, and develop to provide the highest quality of care for patients\(^8\)
  o A new CAS was developed to redefine practice at all levels of staff so that it would consistently reflect the PPM\(^8\)
  o Directly linking the PPM with performance expectations ensures that underlying principles are supported and evident in everyday practice and promotes professional practice advancement\(^8\)
  o The Rush Professional Practice Model\(^8\)
  o Newly developed CAS’s differentiate practice at each level by advancing performance expectations
  o Expectations of the new CAS are achievable based on the development of an individual nurse’s knowledge and skills within the domains of practice\(^8\)
  o New CAS’s pose opportunity to establish qualifications necessary for promotional consideration to next level\(^8\)
  o A tool kit is developed for each unit to aid in implementation which includes\(^8\):
    - Letter from VP of nursing
    - Rush PPM
    - New CAS position descriptions
    - Examples of specific behavioral activities to meet the competencies within each position description
    - A case study illustrating the nursing care interventions at each level
    - FAQs
    - Specific transition guidelines
    - Information regarding certification\(^8\)

**Organizational Environment/Support**

• **Structures**
  o Support from higher administration, flexible schedule, access to education, and tuition support facilitate nurses’ engagement in organizational activities\(^1\)
  o Funding needed for continuing education, conferences, matriculation in degree granting programs, leadership advancement/development programs\(^2,^9\)
  o An open process of implementation creates a climate in which all nurses are supported to continuously enhance their knowledge and skills with prospects for advancement\(^2\)
  o Strategies that promote the success of implementing a clinical advancement system that also reflect the organizations’ professional practice model:\(^8\)
    - Have a clearly articulated leadership vision\(^8\)
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- Mature shared governance model promotes commitment to continued advancement and innovation
- Stakeholder support and involvement promotes effective integration into medical center operations
- Both nurses and managers are directly involved
  - Include the role of a professional development coordinator/designated senior member of staff who is responsible for the implementation of strategies on staff development

- Processes
  - Develop a transparent promotional policy based on the principles of equality of opportunities and diversity
  - Include the development of inclusion criteria for participation, the professional roles, a program manual with the descriptions of each role and track, the process and forms for enrollment and review, and the financial reward system
  - Provide opportunities for participation in career conventions and staff development forums as well as opportunities to serve on internal/external committees, working parties, task groups, and trust policy groups
  - In order to ensure a seamless implementation process of professional development plans (PDP):
    - All new members of staff should be given a mentor and an appraiser as soon as they start
    - Members should be appraised annually and required to develop a PDP with identified development needs and an action plan
    - PDPs should be reviewed periodically
  - Succession Planning
    - Identifies projected critical human resource needs, develops potential candidates, promotes staff ownership of professional development, commits time/financial resources to formal training and developmental assignments, and ensures adequate pool of qualified internal candidates when vacancies occur
    - Benefits:
      - Encourages staff ownership of their own professional growth
      - Creates culture that supports career advancement
      - Demonstrates commitment to career development and professional advancement
      - Powerful employee retention strategy
    - Career mapping can be helpful as part of a succession plan, as it prepares nurses to envision a movement into leadership positions

- Human Resource (HR) Collaboration
  - Allows those involved to aid in the process of determining the new position descriptions, the salary structure, and the number of clinical levels and the determination of qualifications needed per level
  - Allows integration of succession planning into existing HR system to become part of a comprehensive approach to meeting the organizations’ workforce needs

- Outcomes
  - An organizational culture that is supportive of staff development with a positive policy on promotion will advance development and education among nurses
  - A “grassroots” approach that involves all stakeholders helps to facilitate the successful implementation and transition of new clinical advancement systems

Intrapersonal Factors
- A nurse’s participation in professional development and career advancement is influenced by intrapersonal variables
- Human capital factors are the collection of competencies, knowledge, and personality attributes in a person that allows them to be professionally productive; influence them to gain education, clinical knowledge, and skill to drive evidence-based practice
Extrapersonal Factors
- Facilitate a nurses’ engagement in professional development, career advancement, and leadership opportunities
- Social capital factors include the quality and quantity of interactions that result from the culmination of interpersonal relationships
- System capital factors include the positive organizational attributes in the nurses’ work-place that facilitate their engagement in the organization activities
- External support includes the level of support a nurse receives from family, family values, and/or engagement in activities outside the nursing profession

Barriers
- Barriers to advancing professional development include night work, staff shortages, heavy workloads, personal commitments, and poorly defined concepts of nursing

Self-Efficacy
- Emphasized as a major determinant of nurses’ participation in professional development and career advancement programs
- Self-efficacious nurses who receive mentoring are able to acquire leadership qualities, allowing them to advance in their careers to become clinical leaders

Mentorship
- A relationship in which a senior and influential person with advanced experience and knowledge provides support and mobility in advancing the career and professional development of a mentee
- Major determinant of nurses’ participation in professional development and career advancement
- Self-efficacious nurses who receive mentoring are able to acquire leadership qualities, allowing them to advance in their careers to become clinical leaders
- Ongoing mentoring should be provided
- Career Mapping
  - Builds on the hospital’s professional development and advancement programs and helps nurses gain insight into their strengths, weakness, and interests and develop a plan for maximizing their own potential
  - Built around a mentorship model where each participant was matched with a senior-level mentor, and a more junior “clinical advisor”
  - Individualized to nurses’ needs and interests and creates a yearlong plan with specific tasks and a timetable

Professional Development/Career Advancement
- A constant commitment to maintain specific skill levels and career paths; allows nurses to increase skill levels and advance through Benner’s levels of competence
- Career advancement in nursing constitutes any form of professional promotion that recognizes and rewards talent in clinical and administrative nursing practice; provides opportunities for nurses to enhance their competencies by participation in ongoing professional development
- Participation in professional development and career advancement is influenced by intrapersonal and interpersonal variables and work environment
- Professional development is necessary to maintain the unique contribution that nurses make to health care in terms of practice, education, and research
- Empowers nurses to chart their own professional path and take responsibility of their career
- Nurses seeking promotion are normally expected to demonstrate excellence in their area of practice with evidence to support it, typically in the form of continuing education and ongoing continuing professional development
Professional and Educational Preparedness

- Nurses’ level of education and professional preparedness has a major contribution toward their ability to engage in career advancement opportunities, drive evidence-based care, and influence decision-making.¹
- The level of professional preparedness (level of clinical expertise and experience) of nurses is central to their leadership development.¹ (Note: Conflicting results; see Page 3, under Career Advancement for CARE Programs)

Career Stages

- A series of stages in an individuals’ career, each including different positions, responsibilities, or activities and different attitudes as well as behaviors.³
- 4 Career Stages: Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Disengagement.³
  - Exploration Stage: Nurses focus on identifying appropriate areas of work/areas of interest and gaining any required professional skills.³
  - Establishment Stage: Nurses use their professional techniques to produce best possible work outcomes and begin to assess whether to continue with 1) any relevant training and 2) any advanced education.³
  - Maintenance Stage: Nurses hope to maintain their current position, preserve existing achievements, mentor new nurses, and alternately re-evaluate their career direction, and possibly seek other alternatives outside of nursing³
  - Disengagement Stage: Nurses pay attention to which jobs they are concerned with, will start to save for retirement, and start to place increased emphasis on quality of life.³
- Within the 4 career stages, nurses identify needs based on career goals, career tasks, and career challenges.³
  - Career goals focus on existing career needs and determination of direction and aims of current individual efforts.³
  - Career tasks relate to career needs that exist during achievement of these career goals.³
  - Career challenges relate to future career needs which arise from subsequent career development opportunities.³
- Nurses in different career stages have different needs, pay close attention to something different, perform diverse tasks, and cope with various challenges.³
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References


Electronic Database Search Methodology

Date(s): 06/27/14, 06/30/14, 07/01/14, 07/18/14

Clinical question: “What evidence-based educational structures and processes offer essential learning opportunities that acute care staff nurses need to experience professional growth and development?”

Inclusion Criteria: Acute care setting, staff nurses, education for career advancement, professional development
Exclusion Criteria: Ambulatory clinic, SNF, any other healthcare profession (other than staff nurses), topics other than education for career advancement or professional development

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*Use the first database as the main comparison for subsequent database searches and identifying duplicate articles

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Total Articles Included in Literature Review: Database (8) + Contextual Links (2) = 10

*Additional articles/information found in references lists and/or article review*

**Evidence Search Strategies:** A comprehensive search strategy was used to identify published English written evidence between January 2004 and July 2014. The initial search was conducted via PubMed and CINAHL using key words of “career advancement,” “professional development,” and “nurs*.” A second search was conducted using the same databases using alternate search terms of “career mobility,” “nursing staff,” “hospital,” “education,” “organization,” “staff development,” and “models.” A third search was conducted using the same databases using search terms “career advancement,” “professional development,” and “nurs* performance.” To ensure that the search results were comprehensive, a final search using the web browser Google Scholar was conducted at the end of each search using the same key search terms.

366 total references were identified. Relevant articles were then retrieved and 67 were initially selected for inclusion. 23 duplicate articles were excluded, with 44 articles included for review. 36 additional articles were excluded as they did not pertain to the clinical question. 8 relevant articles remained and 2 contextual articles were added. Therefore, 10 articles were included in the final literature review. The evidence consists of 1 literature review, 3 descriptive studies, 1 qualitative correlational/descriptive study.
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**Final Clinical Question:** What evidence-based educational structures and processes offer essential learning opportunities that acute care staff nurses need to experience professional growth and development?

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Collaborative Center for Integrative Reviews and Evidence Summaries

CCires\textsuperscript{©} Evidence Leveling System (ELS)

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* A large sample has adequate power to detect the observed effect with confidence (as seen in significant Confidence Intervals). A small sample may lack confidence in the power of the desired effect (Polit& Beck, 2008)
Purpose/intended Audience

Because we want everyone in our communities to have the healthiest lives possible, we are making our evidence reviews available to the communities we serve to help Californians and others lead healthier lives.

Integrative reviews and evidence summaries are provided as a community service for reference purposes only, and must be used only as specified in this disclaimer. These documents are intended for use by clinicians. If you are not a clinician and are reading these documents, you should understand that the information presented is intended and designed for use by those with experience and training in managing healthcare conditions. If you have questions about them, you should seek assistance from your clinician. The information contained in the evidence reviews is not intended to constitute the practice of medicine or nursing, including telemedicine or advice nursing.

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