

Strengthening Professional Identity in Nursing

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Nursing has evolved significantly over the years, adapting to advances in healthcare, technology, and patient needs. Yet despite these changes, the profession remains rooted in a commitment to caring for others. As nursing leaders, we have an important responsibility not only to prepare nurses for practice, but also to cultivate a strong Professional Identity in Nursing (PIN).

Professional identity is more than a job title or clinical competency. It reflects how nurses see themselves within the profession and how they embody nursing's values, ethics, knowledge, and commitment to patient care. A strong professional identity influences decision-making, leadership, resilience, and professional engagement throughout a nurse's career.

Today's nurses enter practice during a time of unprecedented change. Staffing challenges, increasing patient complexity, and rapid healthcare transformation can make it difficult for new nurses to fully understand the depth and significance of the profession they have joined. Many are focused on mastering clinical skills and adapting to workplace demands, often leaving little opportunity to develop a deeper connection to nursing's purpose and professional values.

This challenge is particularly relevant as Generation Z continues to enter the workforce. Many seek meaningful work, opportunities for growth, and a sense of belonging. They want to understand not only what they do, but why it matters. Professional identity provides that connection, helping nurses see themselves as valued members of a profession that has a profound impact on individuals, families, and communities.

Nursing leaders play a critical role in fostering this development. Professional identity is strengthened through mentorship, coaching, role modeling, and intentional conversations about the purpose and values of nursing. Every interaction with a new nurse provides an opportunity to reinforce professional standards, encourage reflection, and connect daily tasks to the larger mission of healthcare.

When nurses develop a strong professional identity, they are more likely to demonstrate confidence, resilience, engagement, and commitment to the profession. They are better equipped to navigate challenges, advocate for patients, and grow into future leaders themselves.

As we address workforce challenges and prepare the next generation of nurses, professional identity formation must remain a priority. By intentionally investing in mentorship and professional development, nursing leaders can help cultivate a workforce that is not only clinically competent, but

also deeply connected to the values and purpose that define our profession.

The future of nursing depends not only on what nurses know, but on how strongly they identify with the profession they serve. ■



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