Building a Culture of Nursing Excellence: A Boot Camp for Nurse Leaders

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Why Nurse Leader Education Matters

Establishing and sustaining a culture of nursing excellence requires engaged and knowledgeable nurse leaders who can translate professional practice standards into daily operations. Within large healthcare systems, individual organizations may be at different stages of their Magnet Recognition Program® and Pathway to Excellence® journeys, creating variability in nurse leaders' understanding of nursing excellence principles. To address this need, Cleveland Clinic enterprise, a large multistate healthcare system, developed the Nursing Excellence Boot Camp for Nurse Leaders (NEBCNL), a comprehensive educational program designed to strengthen nurse leaders' knowledge, confidence, and ability to lead nursing excellence initiatives across care settings.

From Concept to Boot Camp

The NEBCNL was created for inpatient and ambulatory nurse leaders and delivered through a synchronous, multi-site educational format, connecting in-person participants in Ohio and Florida through live videoconferencing. Participants completed pre-reading related to shared governance and attended an in-person four-hour educational session led by Magnet® and Pathway to Excellence® subject matter experts. The program incorporated interactive quiz-based learning to enhance engagement and knowledge retention.

Educational content addressed the foundational elements of nursing excellence, including the American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Magnet® and Pathway to Excellence® frameworks, shared governance, leadership, professional development, and clinical practice (ANCC, 2021; ANCC, 2023). Sessions also explored succession planning, mentorship, advocacy, nurse well-being, professional board certification, nurse residency programs, evidence-based practice, innovation, and empirical outcomes. Participants received practical resources including educational materials, professional development planning tools, mentorship guides, and conversation prompts designed to help leaders identify and model examples of nursing excellence within their teams.

What Leaders Learned

A distinguishing feature of the boot camp was the emphasis on helping nurse leaders translate nursing excellence concepts into everyday practice. Rather than focusing solely on Magnet® or Pathway to Excellence® program designation requirements (ANCC, 2021; ANCC, 2023), the curriculum provided practical strategies that nurse leaders could immediately apply to strengthen shared governance, professional development, mentorship, and clinical excellence within their departments. Through expert-led instruction, interactive quiz-based learning, and practical resources, nurse leaders gained a deeper understanding of how their day-to-day leadership behaviors contribute to and support a culture of nursing excellence.

Impact Across the Organization

More than 300 nurse leaders from inpatient and ambulatory settings participated in the program. Program evaluations demonstrated increased understanding of Magnet® and Pathway to Excellence® standards (ANCC, 2021; ANCC, 2023), greater confidence in supporting nursing excellence, and improved clarity regarding the nurse leader's role in fostering a culture of nursing excellence. Through post-program evaluation and feedback, participants consistently identified the practical tools and resources as valuable for supporting daily leadership practice.

Lessons for Other Healthcare Organizations

The NEBCNL demonstrated an adaptable, sustainable approach to preparing nurse leaders to advance nursing excellence in both acute and ambulatory settings. The session design enabled broad participation across multiple sites while delivering consistent education and resources. To support ongoing learning, all sessions were recorded and are available on-demand allowing current and future nurse leaders to access the content and resources as needed. Healthcare organizations seeking to strengthen leadership engagement, improve understanding of nursing excellence principles, and support successful Magnet® or Pathway to Excellence® journeys can adapt this model to meet their own organizational needs. ■

References online:
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