

# *Leadership Practices of Head Nurses: A Literature Review*

Andara Maurissa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student of Master nursing science, Nursing Administration,  
Faculty of Nursing,  
Prince of Songkla University, Thailand  
[andara\\_210283@yahoo.com](mailto:andara_210283@yahoo.com)

Aranya Chaowalit<sup>2</sup>, Nongnut Boonyoung<sup>2</sup>

Department of Administration Nursing, Faculty of Nursing,  
Prince of Songkla University, Thailand

**Abstract**— Purpose: To explore the concept of leadership and the leadership practices of head nurses. Method: Literature review on articles retrieved from electronic databases was conducted. The review on leadership practices was set based on the setting of study, head nurses as participants of the study and the year of publication ranged from 2000-2011. Result: Based on previous studies, leadership ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of an organization. Effective leadership can enhance and play significant role in organizational performance. Head nurses play critical roles in health care organizations; therefore, they need to demonstrate leadership abilities. Head nurses who have leadership abilities can influence people toward the achievement of the organizational goals. Otherwise, head nurses should perform their leadership through implementation of the following five practices based on Kouzes and Posner (2001) which include: (1) challenging the process, (2) inspiring a shared vision, (3) enabling to act, (4) modeling the way, and (5) encouraging the heart. Therefore, nursing leaders must be aware of their important roles in taking the lead to face challenge in the modern health care service and can change everywhere they need to implement an effective leader in health care environment. Conclusion: This paper provided leadership of head nurses is very important to our nursing professions and changing health care organization. It is essential review the concept of leadership and leadership practices for exploring the performance leadership practices of head nurses.

**Keywords:** *leadership; leadership practices; leadership style; head nurses*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is important in any organization. Leadership is the process of influencing staffs to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively. Moreover, it is also the process of facilitating individuals and their collective effort to accomplish their goals achieved through own actions [1], [2]. It is the process of helping people to enhance their performance through supporting reflective practice in promoting personal and professional power [3], [4].

Leadership entails leading the people, the structure, and the processes within the organization. Leadership in health care organization is also important because the services are directly given to patients who expect high quality and standard care. As long as people are part of the equation of health

systems as workforce members and patients, leadership will remain a critical component of successful organizations [5]. Nursing is part of the healthcare organization that requires strong leadership. Nursing service in hospitals is an integral part of the overall hospital services and constitutes the successful achievement of hospitals, often becoming a determining factor in the image of public hospitals [6]. Effective nursing leadership improves patient safety [7], [8], reduces patient mortality and increase patient satisfaction [9], [10]. Leadership in nursing also increases productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment within nursing staff and reduces the turnover of staff nurses within an organization [11], [12], it also improves the quality and efficiency of healthcare [13], [14], that are the key outcomes of leadership effort in health care [15].

## II. METHOD

To achieve the objectives of this study, the writer used CINAHL, Science Direct and PubMed databases as the main channel to search the existing studies about the related leadership practices of head nurses. Several keywords were used to find those articles are Leadership, Leadership Style, Leadership practices, and Head nurses.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of the literature reviews is leadership ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of an organization. Nursing leaders must be aware of their important roles in taking the lead to face challenge in the modern health care service and can change everywhere they need to implement an effective leader in health care environment. Based on [16] there are five leadership practices which are essential for being an effective leader: (1) challenging the process, (2) inspiring a share vision, (3) enabling to act, (4) modeling the way, and (5) encouraging the heart. Implementing these leadership practices will help establish the thinking and behaviors necessary to achieve high standards of professional practice and enable staff nurses to promote and achieve successful

healthcare organization. The results and discussion of the literature review are explained as follow:

### *Conceptual framework*

To exploring performance leadership practices of head nurses, the theoretical framework is essential to be considered. The conceptual framework of this study is based on Kouzes and Posner's conceptualization of leadership practice. These leadership practices include: (1) challenging the process, (2) inspiring a shared vision, (3) enabling others to act, (4) modeling the way, and (5) encouraging the heart. Each practice will be described as follows:

#### *1. Challenging the process*

Challenging the process is the practice to search for opportunities to change difficult situations in an organization. Leaders search for opportunities to change at particular conditions and also to find innovative ways to improve the situations. Leaders experiment and take risks in what they do.

#### *2. Inspiring a shared vision*

Inspiring a shared vision is the activities leaders perform to make their followers believe passionately in their own spirits to make a difference in an organization. Leaders persuade and motivate followers through their vision and make them realize the exciting possibilities for the future of a better organization.

#### *3. Enabling others to act*

Enabling others to act includes activities leaders perform to foster collaboration and build spirited teams. They actively involve others in order to enable others to act. Leaders understand that mutual respect is what sustains extraordinary efforts.

#### *4. Modeling the way*

Modeling the way consists of activities that leaders establish principles concerning with the way people, including constituents, peers, colleagues, and customers, should be treated and the way goals should be followed by them. Leaders also create standards of excellence and provide examples for them to follow.

#### *5. Encouraging the heart*

Encouraging the heart is the practice of acknowledging the contributions of others because accomplishing extraordinary work is usually a difficult task. Therefore, leaders recognize efforts that individuals have made for an organization and give them rewards. Leaders value this contribution and celebrate their accomplishments.

### *Definition of leadership*

Leadership is dynamic process for change in the future. It means that leaders must be able to look around, identify the

opportunities and treat every moment [17]. Leadership is particularly individual of leader to get goal in organizational and achieve of other. According to [18], leadership is ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of an organization. [19] defines leadership as one of the five managerial roles in work to development of individual staff.

A study by [20] explained that leadership is about development elements need to recognized facilities environment. These acts may involve activities, such as structuring work relationship, praising group member team, and showing consideration for their welfare and feeling. A study conducted by [21] stated that leadership in every organization has important roles in health care to developing skill and competencies for managing risk. It can give leaders capabilities to handle stress; problem and risk also can provide direction for the profession in health care services. Another study was conducted by [22], he stated that that leadership can increase job satisfaction, self-motivation, and can promote positive work environment also increase knowledge and skill to apply in the health care of practice.

In addition, leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish the share objective or goals in organizations [3]. Thus, leadership is the art not science or discipline, it must be felt, experienced, created to empowering beliefs and teaching others [23].

A study by [24] stated that effective leaders are important in every organization to changing health care organization and profession to lead future generations. They are responsible for disseminating up dated information and support to patients, staff (co-worker), Physician (colleagues) and families. Nurse leader helps nurses to provide best nursing care based on theory and the finding of research. [25] explained that leadership roles and responsibilities are changing, and nurses need to perform leadership functions in various aspects of health care organization. Effective leadership can enhance and play significant role in organizational performance. Nursing leaders must be aware of their important roles in taking the lead to face challenge in the modern health care service and can change everywhere they need to implement an effective leader style in health care environment [26].

As leaders have an ability to see different aspect and situation together with co- worker also influence each other give effect positive for organizational [27]. Study was conducted by [28] he stated that leader and follower are both essential to organization. It means who perceive the leaders as responsible for decision making process and leaders expect to motivate, increase excellent services in nursing practices. Furthermore, leaders focus on people, leading and manage organization in health care. The nurse leaders combines clinical, administrative, financial, and operating skills to solve problems in the care environment, so that nurses can provide cost effective care in a way that is satisfying and health promoting for patients and clients [23].

### *Importance of leadership in nursing practices*

Leadership is important for nurses because they need to possess knowledge and skills in the art and science of solving problems in the work groups, systems of care, and the environment of care delivery [3]. Furthermore, nurses need to be effective leaders to meet global change, health reform, nursing shortages, productivity, and quality of care. Leadership nursing practices must give emphasis to the public safety, as improving patient safety is one of the highest critical issues in health care organization [18].

Health care organization need skilled nurse leader to changing health care environment and in nursing professions, nurse need to develop their knowledge, skill, and competencies of nurses as well as professional development. Thus, effective leaders are important in every organization to cope with changing health care organizations, and profession to lead future generations. They must show professional accountability to provide inspiration, and direction to the profession, organization and patient care [29]. Therefore, leadership practices and nurses intent to stay is fundamental to retaining nurses in workplace. Incorporating relational leadership theory into management practices will influence nurse retention. Supportive work environments and staff nurse intentions to remain in their current positions [30], [31].

### *Leadership style*

There are several leadership styles in nursing practices. Leadership styles that contribute to optimum performance leaders will help nurse in leadership skills to meet the present challenges to performance. Based on [32] leadership style is the manner in which leaders' exhibit specific leadership behavior. The transformational theory identifies four leadership styles: transformational, transactional, management by exception and laissez- faire [23]. The Transformational theory of leadership by Bass (1998) identifies four leadership styles: transformational, transactional, management by exception and laissez- faire. Another study by [33] explained that the relationship of nurses job satisfaction to organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, transactional leadership, transformational leadership and level of education. In additionally, leadership style is an individual choice. Leadership is an important to development of current and future leaders for any successful organizations. Leadership characteristics, skills and approaches of effective and efficient performance are centered in the leader's style [34].

### *Leadership practices*

Several nursing concepts and theories have been integrated in improving leadership practices. It could take on more leadership in improving health care and delivering services also having higher expectations and accountability. Leadership roles and responsibilities to change in health care reform and policy, more of us need to step up to the challenges of leadership. As we know that the importance of nursing leadership for nurses is to be full partners with physician and

others healthcare professional [35]. However, as leaders should have long supported to nurses as they have turned inspiration into action, creating models and programs that show how to do it better than it has been done before. It was found leadership skills include influence, motivation, and enabling others to contribute toward the effectiveness of an organization in health care [18].

Leadership practices competencies as transformation require leaders to enchant in systems thinking, including analytical and critical thinking processes, visioning of potential future, strategic and assessment, communication also change dynamic [36]. Leadership practices of head nurses use a low task and high relationship style, technical competencies for leadership effectiveness. Thus, leadership practices of nurse leaders more effective event ought the leaders motivation and leadership style [37]. Literature review also showed that leadership roles and responsibilities are changing and need to perform leadership in various aspects in health care organization, such as leadership activities emerged in three categories: (1) facilitating staff through support, visibility, and communication, (2) creating a positive activity trough vision, role modeling, and change, (3) influencing organizational structures and process through resources, policies, and monitoring [38].

### *Measurement of leadership practices*

Effective leadership plays role in operating an organization performance. The central role of effective leadership is to build a relationship between those who aspire to lead and who choose to follow. The outcome on using qualified instrument to examine leaders' performance on different leadership dimensions [37]. A study by [25] used one of the most developed and tested instrument is the Kouzes and Posner; *Leadership Practices Inventory* (LPI) based on five practices of leadership. They used the LPI to assess leadership behavior in China. This leadership assessment tool helps individuals and organizations measure their leadership competencies.

## IV. CONCLUSION

This paper provided leadership of head nurses is very important to our nursing professions and changing health care organization. It is essential review the concept of leadership and leadership practices for exploring the performance leadership practices of head nurses. This study will serve as a guideline to improve leadership practices of head nurses.

## V. LIMITATION

This study has the limitations. Firstly, since this study only focusing on the leadership practices of head nurses, there are limited researches that found related to identify more leadership practices of head nurses in hospital. Secondly, all of the studies in this not at all in health care environment setting to assess the leadership practices.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Daft, R. L. (2005). *The leadership experience* (3rd ed). Toronto, Canada: South-western.
- [2] Yukl, G. (2002). *Leadership in organizations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- [3] Huber, L. D. (2010). *Leadership and nursing care management* (4 th ed.). PA: Saunders Elsevier.
- [4] Launer, J. (2006). Reflective practice and clinical supervision, mentoring and coaching. *Work Based Learning in Primary Care, 4*, 268-270.
- [5] Ledlow, R. G., & Coppoda, N. M. (2011). *Leadership for health professionals*. United States of America: Jones & Bartlett learning.
- [6] Cooper, A. M., & Palmer, A. (2000). *Mentoring, preceptorship and clinical supervision: A guide to professional roles in clinical practice* (2 nd ed.). United Kingdom: Blackwell Science.
- [7] Anderson, R. A., Issel, L. M., & McDaniel, R.R. (2003). Nursing homes as complex adaptive systems relationship between management practice and resident outcomes. *Nursing Research, 52*, 12-21.
- [8] Boyle, S. M. (2004). Nursing unit characteristics and patients outcomes. *Nursing Economic, 22*, 111-123.
- [9] Doran, D., McCutcheon, A., Evans, M. G., MacMillan, K., Hall, L., Pringle, D, et al. (2004). *Impact of the managers's span control on leadership and performance*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Health Services Research Foundation.
- [10] Houser, J. (2003). A model for evaluating the context of nursing care delivery. *Journal of Nursing Administration, 33*, 39-47.
- [11] Failla, K. R., & Stichler, J. F. (2008). Manager and staff perceptions of the manager's leadership style. *Journal of Nursing Administration, 38*, 480-487.
- [12] Chiok Foong Loke, J. (2001). Leadership behaviors: Effects on job satisfaction, productivity and organizational commitment. *Journal of Nursing Management, 9*, 191-204.
- [13] McAlearney, A. S. (2008). Using leadership development programs to improve quality and efficiency of healthcare. *Journal of Healthcare Management, 53*, 319-311.
- [14] Wong, C. A & Cummings, G. G. (2007). The relationship between nursing leadership and patient outcomes: A systematic review. *Journal of Nursing Management, 15*, 508-521.
- [15] Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2001). *Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)*. San Francisco, CA: Joseey- Bass/Pleiffer.
- [16] Rust, B. A., & Jager, J. W. (2010). Leadership in public health care: Satisfaction South African hospital. *Academic Journal, 4*, 277-228.
- [17] Murphy, L. (2005). Transformational leadership: A cascading chain reaction. *Journal of Nursing Management, 13*, 128- 136.
- [18] Curtis, A. E., Vries, D. J., & Sheerin, K. F. (2011). Developing leadership in nursing: Exploring core factors. *British Journal of Nursing, 20*, 6-9.
- [19] Jeon, Y. H., Glasgow, N. J., Merlyn, T., & Sansoni, E. (2010). Policy option to improve leadership of middle manager in Australia. *Journal Health Service Research, 10*(190), 1-11.
- [20] Kleimman, C. (2004).The relationship between managerial leadership behaviors and staff nurse retention. *Journal of Research and Perspectives on Healthcare, 82*, 1-9.
- [21] Rengpian, R. (2007). An investigation of perceived leadership practices, organizational commitment and satisfaction with supervisor. *RU International Journal, 1*, 137-160.
- [22] Marquis, B. L., & Huston, C. L. (2003). *Leadership roles and management functions in nursing: Theory and application* (3rd ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott.
- [23] Niemann, R., & Kotze, T. (2006). The relationship between leadership practices and organizational culture. *Journal of Education, 26*, 609-624.
- [24] Chen, H. C., & Baron, M. (2007). Psychometric properties of the Chinese Leadership Practice Inventory. *International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship, 4*, 1-14.
- [25] Hyatt, K. (2010). The influence of the leadership practices "challenging the process" on perceived organizational support. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 17*, 351- 361.
- [26] Nader, R. (2002). Leadership and motivation. Report Retrieved January, 2012
- [27] Vonday, M. (2008). Follower-focused leadership: Effect of follower self-concept on organizational Citizenship behavior. *Emerging Leadership Journey, 1*, 52-61.

[7]

[8]

- [28] Mahoney, J. (2001). Leadership skills for the 21st century. *Journal of Nursing Management, 9*, 269-271.
- [29] Caldwell, F. D., Charles, A. O., & Margaret, L. (2008). Implementing strategic change in health care system: The importance of leadership and change readiness. *Health Care Manage Rev, 33*, 124- 133.
- [30] Cummings, G., Lee, H., Grego, T., Davey, M., Wong, C., Paul, L, et al. (2008). Factors contributing to nursing leadership: A systematic review. *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy, 13*, 240-248.
- [31] Mulen, C., & Dalley, A. G. (2011). Nurse consultant 10 years on: A insight to the role for nurse manager. *Journal of Nursing Management, 19*, 820-831.
- [32] Hussami, A. M. (2008). A study of nurses' job satisfaction: The relationship to organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and level of education. *European Journal of Scientific Research, 22*, 286-295.
- [33] Rukmani, K., Ramesh, M., & Jayakrishnan, J. (2010). Effect of leadership styles on organizational effectiveness. *European Journal of Social Sciences, 15*, 1-6.
- [34] Hassmiller, B. S. (2011). Nursing leadership from bedside to boardroom. *Journal of Nursing Administration, 41*, 306- 308.
- [35] Wrihth, K., Rowitz, L., Merkle, A., Reid, W. M., Robinson, G., Herzog, B., et al. (2000). Competency development in public health leadership. *American Journal of Public Health, 90*, 1202-12.
- [36] Gifford, W., Davies, B., Tourangeau, A., & Lefebvre, N. (2011). Developing team leadership to facilitate guideline utilization: Planning and evaluating a 3-month intervention strategy. *Journal of Nursing Management, 19*, 121-132.
- [37] Zagorsek, H., Stouh, S. J., & Jaklic, M. (2006). Analysis of the reliability of leadership practices inventory in the item response theory framework. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 14*, 180-191.