Empowering Registered Nurses in Aged Care

Teams to be Clinical Leaders

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# Table of contents

Table of contents.................................................................................................................. 3  

Acknowledgements.............................................................................................................. 6  

Abstract................................................................................................................................. 7  

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study .................................................................................... 9  
1.1 Situating the Study........................................................................................................... 9  
1.2 Background to the study: Nursing in the Australian aged care context ....................... 10  
1.3 The concern for a focus on clinical leadership ................................................................. 12  
1.4 Situating the Researcher.................................................................................................. 14  
1.5 Structure of the dissertation ......................................................................................... 16  

Chapter 2: The Literature Review ....................................................................................... 18  
2.1 Introduction.................................................................................................................... 18  
2.2 Acronyms....................................................................................................................... 19  
2.3 Operational definitions................................................................................................. 19  
2.4 What is known by the researcher and what is leading this doctoral study ..................... 21  
2.5 The Move Forward ....................................................................................................... 23  
2.6 The history of the role of Registered Nurses ................................................................. 27  
2.7 Nursing Education as a process within the profession that establishes the roles of nurses in aged care ......................................................................................... 29  
2.8 The role of the registered nurse today “A Global Shortage” and its effects on policy development ...................................................................................................................... 33  
2.9 Registered nurses in aged care: A “Resistance and Resilience” towards policy implementation and change ......................................................................................................... 36  
2.10 Nurses and the aged care organisations, “singing from different hymn books” .......... 39  
2.11 The conflicting paradigms for nurses roles in aged care ............................................. 42  
2.12 The role of the RN and distress in aged care ................................................................ 43  
2.13 Recruitment and retention of the registered nurse in the aged care setting: “getting the balance right” ................................................................................................................ 47  
2.14 The aged care nurse as ‘clinical leader’ or ‘manager’ or ‘both’?.................................. 51  
2.15 Building the future “Nurse Empowerment” through clinical leadership development: The way forward .................................................................................................................. 57  

Chapter 3: Methodology ...................................................................................................... 59  
3.1 Introduction.................................................................................................................... 59  
3.2 The Research Question ................................................................................................. 60  
3.3 Understanding the use of Quantitative Methodology ..................................................... 64  
3.4 Selecting the Quantitative Methods .............................................................................. 65  
3.5 Understanding the use of Qualitative Methodology ...................................................... 65  
3.6 Selecting the Qualitative Methods ................................................................................ 67  
3.7 Understanding the use of Mixed Methodology ............................................................... 68
Chapter 5: Results Qualitative

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Thematic Data Analysis

5.3 Theme One: Leadership training is challenging in a positive way

5.4 Theme two: Leadership training builds confidence in the RN to lead the team

5.5 Theme Three: Leadership training has improved the knowledge and application of clinical leadership for the nurse

5.6 Theme Four: Team Based leadership can improve person centred care

5.7 Theme Five: Successful clinical leadership training needs to be more supported by individuals within the organisation

5.8 Theme Six: Leadership training has a positive impact on professional development, personal growth and career retention

5.9 Summary

Chapter 6: Results Mixed Methods

6.1 Mapping and Integrative Analysis

6.2 Finding One: Leadership Training is significant for the role identity of the RN in aged care
6.3 Finding Two: Leadership training is a positive change agent for transmutation and getting the evidence into practice. ................................................................. 129
6.4 Finding Three: Clinical leadership training should be a core principle for the organisation and valued as a key performance area ........................................... 131
6.5 Finding Four: leadership training is essential for successful recruitment and retention and building healthy workplace environs. .............................................. 133
6.6 Discussion summary ................................................................................. 134

Chapter 7: Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion ......................... 137

7.1 Introduction .............................................................................................. 137

Industry and sector support strategy (for the future delivery of aged care) ........ 138

7.2 Discussion: The aged care industry and its sector support need to collaborate towards a strategy for the future needs of the ageing population and clinical leadership through nursing. ........................................................................... 138
7.3 Recommendation: ................................................................................... 141
7.4 Recommendations .................................................................................... 143

Organisational Implementation strategy (transforming the current workforce .... 144

7.5 Discussion: Leadership training should be a core principle for the organisation and valued as a key performance area .................................................. 144
7.6 Recommendation: ................................................................................... 146
7.7 Recommendation: ................................................................................... 148
7.8 Discussion: Clinical leadership training is a positive change agent for transforming nurses and getting the evidence into practice. .............................. 150
7.9 Recommendation: ................................................................................... 152
7.11 Conclusion ............................................................................................. 155

References ........................................................................................................ 158

APPENDIX A: Flyer for Control Group 2 ......................................................... 163
APPENDIX B: Proposal Flyer for Intervention Group 1 ................................. 164
APPENDIX C: Survey Questions .................................................................... 165
APPENDIX D: Integrated Analysis Table for Convergence ......................... 165
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Abstract

This Doctoral study explored the impact of structured clinical leadership training on registered nurses who hold positions as clinical leaders and managers in Residential Aged Care Facilities (formally Nursing Homes) in Australia. The aim of the study was to empower nursing workforce in Australian aged care settings through a formal clinical leadership and leadership training program that represented an intervention designed to empower participants to become care team leaders. The study followed a sequential mixed-methods design and included a pre and post-intervention survey completed by the 150 members of the intervention/study and the 150 members of the control group.

The intervention group engaged in a structured 5-module training course in clinical leadership undertaken over a period of 5 months. This group was then involved in a qualitative interview and a process of thematic analysis was used to analyse transcripts of these sessions to enhance the findings of the quantitative survey results. The results from both the quantitative and qualitative inquiry were then synthesised through integrative analysis.

The findings from this study suggest that nurses are well suited to being transformational leaders in aged care and that clinical leadership training has the capacity to empower registered nurses to become care team leaders in managing the multidisciplinary team. Clinical Leadership training gave clarity to the position of RN Team Leader and provided skills in leading the team to improved outcomes for all stakeholders.
The role of the RN in aged care is a specialised one and as such requires contextualised clinical leadership training that empowers the nurse to transact with the team and transform the care. The study findings also suggest that, if organisations respect the value of a nurse’s autonomy and skills to practice, along with the valued role of the RN as the Clinical leader, then improved recruitment and retention of nurses in aged care will be achieved.

Society is changing and so too are the demands on healthcare. As the population of the world ages, there will be a fundamental shift in how we provide care and support to an increasing number of frailing individuals and their circles of influence. Nurses are instrumental for leading change and, once trained in clinical leadership, become empowered and positively disposed towards what is usually a complex and diverse care setting. Nurses and nursing care continues to hold the high ground on the values and principles of society that reflect the expectation of the profession in supporting their needs. The true value will be realised when we empower the nurses to be the change champions in clinical leadership in aged care.