

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36489/saudecoletiva.2021v11i67p6705-6718>

The key challenges facing nurses in nursing leadership

Los principales desafíos para las enfermeras en el liderazgo de enfermería

Os principais desafios dos enfermeiros na liderança em enfermagem

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study is an integrative review that aims to identify what the scientific literature has addressed the key challenges in nursing leadership. **Method:** The studies used in this article were collected on the PubMed, Scielo, and Cochrane databases. The inclusion criterion was the year of publication and the exclusion criterion was the absence of keywords in the title and abstract. **Result:** The searches resulted in 1,430 articles, 24 met the eligibility criteria and were included in this review. **Conclusion:** After reading and analyzing the articles, 12 main challenges were identified, with developing leadership skills being the main topic addressed. Due to the complexity of understanding and overcoming the challenges identified, new studies on nursing leadership are suggested.

DESCRIPTORS: Nurse; Leadership; Administration.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: El presente estudio es una revisión integradora que tiene como objetivo identificar lo que la literatura científica ha abordado sobre los principales desafíos que enfrentan las enfermeras en el liderazgo de enfermería. **Método:** Los estudios utilizados en esta revisión se recopilaron mediante las bases de datos PubMed, Scielo y Cochrane. El criterio de inclusión fue el año de publicación y el criterio de exclusión fue la ausencia de palabras clave en el título y el resumen. **Resultado:** Las búsquedas dieron como resultado 1430 artículos, 24 cumplieron los criterios de elegibilidad y se incluyeron en esta revisión. **Conclusión:** A partir de la lectura y análisis de los artículos se identificaron 12 desafíos principales, siendo el desarrollo de habilidades de liderazgo el tema principal abordado. Debido a la complejidad de comprender y superar los desafíos identificados, se sugieren nuevos estudios sobre liderazgo en enfermería.

DESCRIPTORES: Enfermera; Liderazgo; Administración.

RESUMO

Objetivo: O presente estudo trata-se de uma revisão integrativa que tem como objetivo identificar o que a literatura científica tem abordado acerca dos principais desafios enfrentados pelos enfermeiros na liderança em enfermagem. **Método:** Os estudos utilizados nesta revisão foram coletados por meio das bases de dados PubMed, Scielo e Cochrane. O critério de inclusão foi o ano de publicação e o critério de exclusão foi a ausência das palavras-chave no título e no resumo. **Resultado:** As buscas resultaram em 1.430 artigos, dos quais 24 atenderam aos critérios de elegibilidade e foram incluídos nesta revisão. **Conclusão:** A partir da leitura e análise dos artigos, foram identificados 12 principais desafios, sendo que o desenvolvimento de habilidades de liderança foi o principal tema abordado. Devido a complexidade de compreender e superar os desafios identificados, sugere-se novos estudos sobre liderança em enfermagem.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Enfermeiro; Liderança; Administração.

RECEIVED ON: 03/10/2021 APPROVED ON: 03/22/2021

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INTRODUCTION

There are constantly changes in the political, economic and social scenarios, which make the job market have to adapt to the new molds, demanding more and more new skills from professionals. Among these, the practice of leadership has been widely required in several work environments.¹

In Brazil, the exercise of the nursing profession is regulated by the Federal Nursing Council (COFEN) through Law No. 7.498/86. Article 11 of this Law, describes the activities assigned to the nurse. Most of these activities are related to the planning, organization, coordination, execution and evaluation of nursing care services, which demonstrates that the nurse's work exceeds care and assistance.²

It is no coincidence that most hospital management positions are occupied by nurses, since this professional is already directed to leadership in their training. Nurses play an important role as managers in the health care provided to the population, in view of their competence in leading and dealing with various situations that require analysis and understanding of the entire work process, as well as constant decision-making.³

In this context, the objective of this study is to identify what the scientific literature has addressed about the main challenges faced by nurses about leadership and to discuss this information in the form of an integrative review in order to support the professional development of nurses in relation to the practice of nursing leadership.

METHODS

This study is an integrative literatu-

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re review, a methodology that aims to group and integrate studies related to a given subject. The integrative review provides the synthesis of information and the incorporation of results of significant studies in practice, being widely used in the health area.⁴

The material used was collected in the scientific literature with the help of Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS), Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) and the PubMed, Scielo and Cochrane databases.

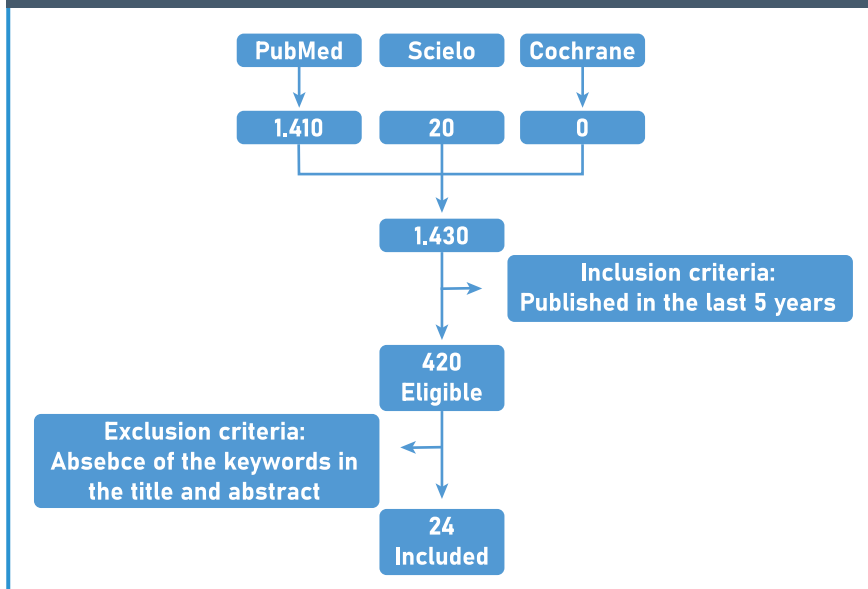
For the construction of the search strategy, the keywords nurse, leadership and administration were inserted in the DeCs, resulting in the descriptors nurse, leadership and administration. Subsequently, the descriptors were inserted in MeSH, in order to find all their indexed synonyms, which allowed the development of the following search strategy: (Nurse [Title] OR Nurses [Title]) AND (Leadership [Title] OR Influentials [Title] OR Administration [Title]).

The inclusion criterion used was the year of publication, with only articles published in the last 5 years being selected. The exclusion criterion, in turn, was the absence of keywords in the title and abstract.

To select the studies that fit the theme and purpose of this review, the titles and abstracts of the scientific articles published in the last 5 years were read, looking for the following keywords: challenges, nurses, leadership and administration. Articles in Portuguese, English and Spanish were considered in this study.

After selecting the articles, a more in-depth reading was carried out, in order to identify what the studies addressed about the main challenges for nurses in nursing leadership. The data were analyzed and treated with the

Figure 1. Number of articles found, eligible and included in the integrative review.



help of tools from the Office Package (Word and Excel).

RESULTS

1.430 articles were found, 24 of which met the inclusion and exclusion criteria and were included in this review (Figure 1). Table 1 shows the characterization of the studies included in the integrative review using a database, title, type of study, authors, journals and year of publication.

Figure 2 presents the main challenges identified from reading and analyzing the articles. The challenges were subdivided according to the number of times the topic was addressed. It can be seen that "developing leadership skills" was the main topic addressed, being present in 6 of the 24 selected articles.

Chart 1. Presentation of the characterization of the studies included in the integrative review using: Database, Title, Type of study, Authors, Periodical and year of publication.

DATA BASE	TITLE	STUDY TYPE	AUTHORS	PERIODICAL AND YEAR OF PUBLICATION
PubMed	Growing Nurse Leaders: Their Perspectives on Nursing Leadership and Today's Practice Environment	Qualitative study	Dyess S, Sherman R, Pratt B, Chiang-Hanisko L	OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing, 2016
PubMed	Nurse Practitioner Autonomy and Relationships with Leadership Affect Teamwork in Primary Care Practices: A Cross-Sectional Survey	Cross-sectional research	Poghosyan L, Liu J	Journal of General Internal Medicine, 2016
Scielo	Professional competences and organizational strategies of nursing managers	Qualitative study	Camelo SHH, Rocha FLR, Chaves LDP, Silva VLS, Soares MI	Ciencia y Enfermeria, 2016
PubMed	Contributions of Paulo Freire to understanding the dialogic leadership exercise of nurses in the hospital setting	Qualitative study	Amestoy SC, Oliveira AFL, Thofehr MB, Trindade LL, Santos BP, Bao ACP	Revista Gaúcha de Enfermagem, 2017
PubMed	Toward a mediation model for nurses' well-being and psychological distress effects of quality of leadership and social support at work	Cross-sectional research	Van der Heijden BIJM, Mulder RH, König C, Anselmann V	Medicine, 2017
Scielo	Leadership in nursing: Challenges and possibilities	Editorial	Balsanelli AP	Acta Paulista de Enfermagem, 2017
PubMed	Nurse Managers' Emotional Intelligence and Effective Leadership: A Review of the Current Evidence	Literature review	Prezerakos PE	The Open Nursing Journal, 2018
PubMed	Nurse Managers' Emotional Intelligence and Effective Leadership: A Review of Current Evidence	Review Article	Al-Motlaq M	The Open Nursing Journal, 2018

PubMed	Exploring the role of advanced nurse practitioners in leadership	Qualitative study	Anderson C	Nursing Standard, 2018
PubMed	Health promoting leadership: A qualitative study from experienced nurses' perspective	Qualitative study	Furunes T, Kaltveit A, Akerjordet K	Journal of Clinical Nursing, 2018
PubMed	Rationing nurses: Realities, practicalities, and nursing leadership theories	Investigation	Fast O, Rankin J	Nursing Inquiry, 2018
Scielo	Management challenges for best practices of the Kangaroo Method in the Neonatal ICU	Qualitative study	Silva LJ, Leite JL, Silva TP, Silva IR, Mourão PP, Gomes TM	Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem, 2018
PubMed	Barriers to nurse leadership in an Indonesian hospital setting	Qualitative study	Wardani E, Ryan T	Journal of Nursing Management, 2019
PubMed	Preparing Nurse Managers for Authentic Leadership	Cross-sectional study	Frasier N	The Journal of Nursing Administration, 2019
PubMed	An inductive qualitative approach to explore Nurse Practitioners views on leadership and research: An international perspective	Qualitative study	Ryder M, Jacob E, Hendricks J	Journal of Clinical Nursing, 2019
PubMed	Developing effective nurse leadership skills	Qualitative study	Major D	Nursing Standard, 2019
PubMed	The Effect of Leadership Interventions on Staff Nurse Job Enjoyment and Leadership Perception	Qualitative study	Correa PB, Bacon CT	The Journal of Nursing Administration, 2019
Scielo	Being an entrepreneur in nursing: challenges to nurses in a strategic leadership position	Qualitative, descriptive and exploratory study	Richter SA, Santos EP, Kaiser DE, Capellari C, Ferreira GE	Acta Paulista de Enfermagem, 2019
PubMed	Influence of nurse and midwife managerial leadership styles on job satisfaction, intention to stay, and services provision in selected hospitals of Rwanda	Descriptive cross-sectional study	Ngabonzima A, Asingizwe D, Kouveliotis K	BMC Nursing, 2020
PubMed	Transformational leadership: journal club for emergency and intensive care nurse managers	Qualitative research	Pereira MV, Spiri WC, Spagnuolo RS, Juliani CMCM.	Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem, 2020
PubMed	'It's the relationship you develop with them': emotional intelligence in nurse leadership. A qualitative study	Qualitative study	Mansel B, Einion A	British Journal of Nursing, 2020
PubMed	Clinical Nurses' Perceptions of Authentic Nurse Leadership and Healthy Work Environment	Descriptive, correlational and cross-sectional study	Raso R, Fitzpatrick JJ, Masick K	The Journal of Nursing Administration, 2020
Scielo	Leadership in the perspective of Family Health Strategy nurses	Action Research	Oliveira C, Santos LC, Andrade J, Domingos TS, Spiri WC	Revista Gaúcha de Enfermagem, 2020
Scielo	Transformational leadership in nursing practice: challenges and strategies	Qualitative and exploratory study	Ferreira VB, Amestoy SC, Silva GTR, Trindade LL, Santos IAR, Varanda PAG	Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem, 2020

DISCUSSION

Developing leadership skills was the main challenge identified. The

studies addressed the barriers that hamper the development of leadership skills,^{5,6,7} the development of leadership in newly qualified nurses,

⁸ factors related to the team, the leadership processes and the leader⁹ and the challenges and strategies adopted for exercising leadership.¹⁰

Figure 2. The main challenges for nurses in nursing leadership identified in the scientific literature.



The main factors mentioned as barriers to the development of leadership skills were: limited perspectives,⁵ gender issues,^{5,7} contractual and professional barriers,^{5,7} hierarchical and organizational structure issues,^{5,10} fast pace and sudden changes in the work environment,⁶ lack of support from the institution^{7,8,10} and professional inexperience and joviality.^{8,10}

Studies have also shown ways to overcome this challenge. Wardani, Ryan⁵ reported that, persistent support and education is needed. To Major,⁸ senior nurses and healthcare organizations should not expect newly qualified nurses to develop leadership skills without support, so clear educational paths are needed throughout the training. Anderson⁷ he also warned that, if this support is not available, the aging population will result in a significant reduction in available nursing leaders in the future.

Promoting a good work environment was the second most discussed topic. Studies have shown that the relationships between nurse-leaders and staff do not always favor a healthy and stimulating work environment,¹¹ which makes conflict management and the search for a good work environment great challenges for nurses.¹²

Promoting a good work environment was the second most discussed topic. Studies have shown that the relationships between nurse-leaders and staff do not always favor a healthy and stimulating work environment,

The study by Van der Heijden et al.¹³ investigated the effects of the quality of leadership and social support at work on the well-being and psychological distress of nurses. The authors reported that the positive and negative influences related to the quality of leadership, the social support of the leader and co-workers and the work environment itself, have a great influence on the well-being and psychological suffering of nurses.

Farunes et al.¹⁴ and Raso et al.¹⁵ they also contemplated the nurses' perception of the work environment and pointed out the importance of having a health-promoting environment that constantly seeks improvements,¹⁴ health-promoting work environments allow nurses to flourish and having broad autonomy is important for nurses to see challenges as opportunities to develop their skills.

The question of autonomy previously mentioned by Farunes et al.,¹⁴ was addressed as the main challenge in other studies^{16,17,18} and it was related to teamwork and gender issues. In addition, factors such as limited governance and political issues also had an influence on decision-making autonomy.¹⁹

Studies by Poghosyan, Liu¹⁶ and Silva et al.¹⁷ demonstrated that autonomy and favorable relationships with leadership improve teamwork. However, the study by Silva et al.¹⁷ pointed out that the biggest challenge of leadership is having autonomy for decision making and that the lack of autonomy is one of the factors that hinder the establishment of bonds of trust and, consequently, teamwork, which, in turn, is directly linked to the personal and professional development of individuals and the quality of patient care.

In addition to the relationship with teamwork, it is possible to observe in the study by Richter et al.,¹⁸ carried out with the intention of knowing the challenges of nurses in a strategic position of leadership in the development of entrepreneurial actions, a relationship between lack of autonomy and gender issue. Ac-

According to the authors, at the same time that high institutional performance is required of these women who occupy strategic leadership positions, they have little autonomy and credibility, which immobilizes them in the development of entrepreneurial actions.

The development of emotional intelligence was also a topic pointed out as a challenge for nurses. Prezerakos²⁰ assessed the relationship between the emotional intelligence of nursing managers and effective leadership. The results showed that emotional intelligence is an important tool for achieving effective management, but its development is still a major challenge for nurses. This study by Prezerakos²⁰ was commented and reinforced by Al-Motlaq.²¹

Mansel, Einion²² they also studied emotional intelligence and its relationship with nursing leadership. The authors reported that the challenges for emotional development identified by leaders were in relation to time, pressure and insufficient staffing levels. These factors seem to suppress the potential to become more effective leaders using emotional intelligence. The authors suggest allocating sufficient time and resources for team engagement in activities that can increase their ability to develop and apply emotional intelligence in their professional lives.

Choosing the right leadership style was identified as a challenge that directly influences the relationship between leaders and their team. Frasier²³ studied the use of authentic leadership by nursing managers and reported that managers perceived greater self-awareness and subordinates perceived positive changes in managers' behavior. The study by Ngabonzima et al.,²⁴ to assess the relationship between leadership styles and job satisfaction, it also showed that the level of satisfaction varied according to the leadership style adopted. Balsanelli²⁵ it also suggested the use of measurement instruments, which can optimize the mapping of nurses' leadership styles and adopt in-

dividual development plans, with goals to be achieved, thus stimulating the development of this competence.

The literature presented relevant data and information that allowed us to understand what are the main challenges for nurses in nursing leadership. Twelve challenges were identified, and “developing leadership skills” was the main challenge addressed.

Amestoy et al.²⁶ conducted a study with the objective of knowing nurses' understanding of the exercise of dialogical leadership in the hospital environment, as well as the challen-

ges faced to exercise leadership. The authors observed that dialogical leadership is understood as the nurse's ability to coordinate and organize the nursing team based on horizontal relationships, guided by dialogue. As for the challenges, the authors highlighted the hierarchical and power relationships and the lack of professional experience, which was also mentioned by Ferreira et al.¹⁰ in his study.

In the study by Ryder et al.²⁷ it is possible to identify the lack of confidence in research as a challenge for nurses. The authors explored the ways in which nurse leaders implement leadership and research in their roles and concluded that nurses are clinical leaders focused on improving health care delivery to patient populations, however, they lack the confidence to conduct research independently., making the research need the support of nurses from the academy.

Finally, Fast, Rankin²⁸ raised the issue of the use of technologies as a challenge in the hospital environment. According to the authors, tight budgets and a growing set of technologies that guide decisions in relation to a sufficient number of personnel, have shaped the responsibilities of managers to institutional objectives, thus hampering the practice of leadership.

CONCLUSION

The literature presented relevant data and information that allowed us to understand what are the main challenges for nurses in nursing leadership. Twelve challenges were identified, and “developing leadership skills” was the main challenge addressed.

It is suggested to divide the challenges into three large groups to facilitate their visualization, namely: Develop leadership skills and emotional intelligence; Promote a good work environment, encouraging autonomy and teamwork; and Overcoming barriers related to gender issues, lack of profes-

sional experience, lack of confidence, use of new technologies and political and hierarchical issues.

When analyzing these large groups,

one can notice a certain complexity in overcoming these challenges in practice. Thus, it is suggested to carry out further studies on the practice of lea-

dership in nursing, in order to assist in overcoming these challenges, thus supporting improvements in the practice of leadership by nurses. ■

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