



Creating a career legacy map to help assure meaningful work in nursing

Pamela S. Hinds, PhD, RN, FAAN^{a,b,c,d,*}, Dorienda R. Britton, BS^{a,c},
Lael Coleman, BA^{a,c}, Eileen Engh, MSN, RN-BC, CPN^{a,c},
Tina Kunze Humbel, MSN/MHA, RN-BC, CPN, CCRN^{a,c}, Susan Keller, BS, MLS, MS^{a,c,d},
Katherine Patterson Kelly, PhD, RN^{a,c,d}, Johanna Menard, BSN, RN, CPN^{a,c},
Marlene A. Lee, MSN, RN^{a,c,e},
Renee Roberts-Turner, DHA, MSN, RN, NEBC, CPHQ^{c,f},
Dory Walczak, MA, MSHI, RN, NE-BC, CPHQ^{a,c}

^a Department of Nursing Research and Quality Outcomes

^b Center for Translational Science

^c Children's National Health Systems

^d The George Washington University

^e The Clinical and Translational Science Institute at Children's National

^f Department of Professional Practice and Magnet

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ABSTRACT

When nurses declare a professional legacy (or what they intend to be better in health care because of their efforts), they are likely to maintain a focus on achieving their legacy and to experience meaning in the process. We depict the legacy and involved steps in creating a legacy map, which is a concrete guide forward to intended career outcomes. Informed by the “meaningful work” literature, we describe a legacy map, its function, the process to create one, and the application of a legacy map to guide careers. We also describe an administrative benefit of the legacy map—the map can be used by team leaders and members to secure needed resources and opportunities to support the desired legacy of team members. Legacy mapping can be a self-use career guidance tool for nurses and other health care professionals or a tool that links the career efforts of a team member with the career support efforts of a team leader.

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“Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.”

—John F. Kennedy

September 17, 1960 (The American Presidency Project; <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=74076>)

Individuals who choose careers in nursing are commonly motivated by a desire to help others through improved clinical care, care systems, and care outcomes (Donner & Wheeler, 2001; Henry & Henry, 2005). The motivation and the intended end points of care improvements represent a career legacy or a

* Corresponding author: Pamela S. Hinds, 111 Michigan Avenue, NW, Children's National Health Systems, Washington, DC 20010.

E-mail address: pshinds@childrensnational.org (P.S. Hinds).

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formal declaring of what will be better in health care as a result of planned steps to create or contribute to the desired improvements (Hinds et al., 2013). Together, the declared legacy and the identified steps to achieve the legacy comprise a legacy map. The map is a depiction of the declared legacy and includes a plan that serves as a guide forward with measureable metrics to the desired improvements. In this way, legacy mapping in nursing is done with a sense of purpose and intentionality to contribute to the well-being of others through purposeful and meaningful work engagement. We have created, implemented, and refined a process to create the legacy map and its use that serves both motivational and practical purposes. We describe here the process, its use, and its outcomes. We acknowledge that our use of the word legacy differs from its more common usage of a bequest or gift given from a predecessor. We use it here to mean the nurses' plan to contribute knowledge, practice changes, or other aspects of health care to benefit those who receive nursing care.

Background

There are two important and distinct discussions in the professional literature regarding career development, one focused primarily on achieving work goals and the other on achieving work meaning. London (1993) describes the individual's realism and clarity of career goals including the ability to achieve the goals. Messmer (2003) and Manson (2009) define career success as goal accomplishment or achievement of an objective and career persistence achieved by overcoming goal challenges. Related literature examines the correlates to career clarity and decision making with particular emphasis on career self-efficacy and decision-making anxiety (greater career self-efficacy being associated with lower decision-making anxiety; Niles & Sowa 1992) and proactive career self-management (i.e., an individual setting goals and developing relevant skills with less reliance on employers; Strauss, Griffin, & Parker, 2012). In this literature, career mapping is a tool used to engage professionals (nurses) in developing a career goal such as achieving promotion and specifying incremental steps (Shermont, Krepcio, & Murphy, 2009). An institutional approach to foster goal accomplishment in nursing is the use of career or clinical ladders. The ladders are comprised of levels of activities selected by the institution as meriting recognition financially and by titling to represent career advancement. The ladders tend to be for nurses in direct care and not nursing leadership (Adeniran, Bhattacharya, & Adeniran, 2012; Buchan, 1999; Donley & Flaherty, 2008). Certainly, this literature with its emphasis on goal achievement is helpful for career development, but it risks being insufficient if the more humanistic values of meaning, purpose, and professional fulfillment are not considered.

Lieff (2009) describes the pursuit of meaningful work as part of effective career decision making in academic medicine and specifically addresses the importance of feeling effective, creative, and balanced in a career. Emphasis is placed on the importance of achieving self-realization or authenticity through a meaningful career (Brown & Gundermann, 2006; Svejnova, 2005) and the benefits to an organization when employees find meaning in their work (i.e., greater commitment to the setting, lower intentions to leave, and higher job satisfaction; Duffy, Bott, Allan, Kik, & Torrey, 2012). One segment of this discussion, the constructivist-social-constructionist perspective, gives far greater emphasis to work meaning by viewing careers as vehicles for individuals to live personally meaningful lives that contribute to improved social conditions for others (Hartung & Tabler, 2013).

The work meaning literature also speaks to higher-order goals reflecting purposefulness (described as having intentionality and directedness to work behavior) and the experience of meaningfulness in work (or the significance to an individual of their work efforts). More pointedly and of particular relevance to nursing, work meaning includes the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of others (Barrick, Mount, & Li, 2013; Grant, 2007). These higher-order goals are theorized to be more enduring than goals specific to achieving a certain role or career opportunity because they are causally linked to a sense of professional well-being. In nursing, such goals are helpful to all but considered to be critical to retaining midcareer nurses in the nursing discipline (Donner & Wheeler, 2001).

Importantly, relationships are key to individuals finding work meaning; the relationships can be with peers, supervisors, or those who benefit from work efforts such as patients and their families (Grant, 2007). McNeese-Smith and Van Servellen (2000) specifically recommend that career planning between nurses and their employing organizations occur to prevent disengagement of nurses from their work, less commitment, and lower job satisfaction. Lieff (2009) recommends specific exercises to assist individuals in identifying meaningful work. The exercises include writing a brief autobiography that emphasizes values linked to career success, developing a list of personal values for use in career decision making, reflecting on peak experiences at work, and purposefully examining the match between personal and work values. Similarly, others recommend self-discovery workshops for nurses that are instructive regarding personal reflection as a way to renew career commitment (Donner & Wheeler, 2001; Price, 1998). Reflection is inherent to the process of legacy mapping.

Legacy planning and legacy mapping incorporate the aspects of the career goal planning literature but additionally include career meaning and purpose, which emphasize a career that both "gives back" to others and satisfies self. Legacy planning and mapping facilitate an interactive process with others who commit to supporting the declared legacy, thus

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