



Leadership mentoring in nursing research, career development and scholarly productivity: A systematic review



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ABSTRACT

Background: Although nursing has been an academic discipline for decades, the infrastructure for nursing research in many countries is still fragile and struggling. Postdoctoral nurses have difficulties developing sustaining careers in nursing research due to lack of career opportunities. Considerable research has been conducted on leadership and mentoring in various areas of nursing. We aimed to systematically review the literature investigating leadership programs and mentoring for postdoctoral nurse researchers, as well as the influence of leadership and mentoring on research productivity, research career development, leadership knowledge and skills, the nurses' health and well-being, staff relationships, work culture and collaboration, salaries and post-doctoral nurses' experiences.

Methods: A systematic review following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement was conducted. The electronic databases PubMed, CINAHL and EMBASE were searched without time limits for eligible studies up to January 2016. Reference lists of included articles were also searched manually and authors were contacted to inquire about other relevant papers. Two authors independently assessed eligibility of studies for inclusion. Titles and abstracts were matched with the inclusion criteria: studies investigating leadership and mentoring programs for postdoctoral nurses and leadership and mentoring influencing research productivity, and career development; and leadership knowledge and skills and other outcomes. The quality of the studies was appraised using the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine for surveys, the Critical Appraisal Skill Program Qualitative Appraisal Checklist for qualitative studies, and a critical appraisal list for mixed methods studies. Any disagreements were resolved by consensus. Data were extracted by two reviewers.

Findings: We screened 1775 titles and abstracts, resulting in 15 studies, which included quantitative, descriptive, qualitative and mixed methods designs and involved 3855 postdoctoral nurses. Two studies presenting mentoring programs for postdoctoral nurses were identified. Other studies investigated the influence of mentoring on various outcomes. The findings showed a positive influence of mentoring on research productivity, including increase in publications and grant writing and research career development, improved leadership skills and knowledge. Furthermore, mentoring positively influenced nurses' health and well-being, staff relationships, work culture and collaboration. Postdoctoral nurses' experience of mentoring, mentorship, leadership and peer-support is essential in supporting ongoing research activity.

Conclusion: Although there is a lack of studies with robust designs investigating leadership and mentoring programs, our results document some evidence of mentoring's influence on research productivity, career development and other outcomes of postdoctoral nurses.

What is already known about this topic?

- Nursing leadership and mentoring are regularly called for to manage challenging situations within the discipline of nursing.
- Considerable research has been conducted on leadership and

mentoring in various areas of nursing.

What this paper adds

- This is the first systematic review of leadership and mentoring

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programs for postdoctoral nurse researchers and the influence of leadership and mentoring on research productivity, leadership knowledge and skills and career development.

- We found some evidence of mentoring on research productivity, career development and other outcomes of postdoctoral nurses.
- There is a need for postdoctoral leadership and mentoring programs for novice nurse researchers to strengthen leadership, strategic direction, partnership development and collaboration on a national and international level.

Although nursing has been an academic discipline for decades, the infrastructure for nursing research in many countries is still fragile and struggling (Moreno-Casbas, 2005; Segrott et al., 2006; Smith and Zsohar, 2007). The quality of the research remains descriptive and poorly described, with a lack of a programmatic endeavours (Richards et al., 2014). Due to the growing evidence for the impact of nursing on societal and patient outcomes and the fact that nursing accounts for a large part of the health care workforce (Aiken et al., 2014; Bruyneel et al., 2015; Cho et al., 2015; Stimpfel et al., 2016), it is important to invest in the career development of nurse researchers in nursing faculties (Hamers and Visser, 2012). The lack of academic positions and increased competition for funding make it difficult for nurses to develop a sustaining career in nursing research. Nursing researchers generally work within the tripartite function of the academy, which includes research, clinical practice and teaching (Morin and Ashton, 2004). The recognition of the complexity of these different roles and organizational contexts demands strong leadership and mentoring competencies (Cummings et al., 2010).

Leadership is described as a process that entails influence, occurs within a group setting and involves achieving goals reflecting common vision (HBR, 2011; Northouse, 2004; Hunt, 2004; Shaw, 2007; Shortell and Kaluzny, 2006). There is growing evidence for leadership practices positively impacting outcomes in various health care arenas (Gilmartin and D'Aun, 2007), including nursing (Cummings et al., 2010; Wong and Cumming, 2007; Cummings, 2005). In their review, Cummings et al. (2010) reported that leadership styles focused on people and relationships (transformational, resonant, supportive, and consideration) were associated with higher nurse job satisfaction, increased organizational commitment, improved staff health and well-being, and greater nurse empowerment, as well as higher individual, team and organizational productivity. Leadership practices of formal nurse leaders and managers positively impacted outcomes for organizations, patients (Wong and Cummings, 2007) and health care providers (Cummings et al., 2005). Although some leadership programs for nurses partly include the development of leadership competencies in research, there is a lack of studies investigating the outcomes of these programs (Beverley et al., 2006; Coffmann et al., 2013; Fagin et al., 2006; Franklin et al., 2011; Hadidi et al., 2013; Heinrich and Oberleitner 2012; Jacelon et al., 2003; Jacob and Sanches, 2010; Lewallen et al., 2003; Maas et al., 2006, 2009; McBride et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2006).

Mentoring was defined as a transactional process transmitting information, advice, support and expertise from an experienced to a less-experienced individual (Bowen, 1985). Mentoring concerns career enhancement, professional development, building and maintaining a professional network, increasing competence and self-esteem (Wright and Wright, 1987; Jacelon et al., 2003). Mentoring stimulates the rapid growth and productivity of nursing faculty and is considered an important element in solving the nursing faculty shortage (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2012; National League for Nursing, 2006; Zellers et al., 2008). Studies have shown mentoring to improve faculty socialization (McDonald et al., 2010), faculty role development (Jacelon et al., 2003), decrease faculty stress (Lewallen et al., 2003) and assist with recruitment and retention (Sawatzky and Enns, 2009). Earlier work on underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) demonstrated that mentoring was related to increased academic productivity, among other outcomes

(Clark et al., 2016). However, research mentoring, where more senior faculty mentor novice faculty, has received little attention in the literature (Morrison-Beedy et al., 2001; Mundt, 2001; Byrne and Keefe, 2002; Nolan et al., 2008). Despite the strong consensus regarding the need for research mentoring, there is concern regarding the ability of senior faculty to adequately fulfil this need (Morrison-Beedy et al., 2002; Byrne and Keefe, 2002). Providing more opportunities for research mentoring may be important for the growth of the nursing profession and its positive impact on the health of society.

Based on this background, the purpose of this review was to synthesise the published evidence on the effectiveness of leadership and mentorship on the research productivity, leadership knowledge and skills and career development of postdoctoral nurses. Therefore, the following research questions guided the systematic review:

1. What leadership/mentoring programs for postdoctoral nurses are described in the literature, and what is the outcome of these programs concerning research productivity, research career development, leadership knowledge and skills, the nurses' health and well-being, staff relationships, work culture and collaboration, and salaries of postdoctoral nurses?
2. What is the influence of leadership programs and mentorship for postdoctoral nurses on research in research productivity, research career development, leadership knowledge and skills, the nurses' health and well-being, staff relationships, work culture and collaboration, and salaries of postdoctoral nurses?
3. What experiences do postdoctoral nurses have with leadership programs and mentoring concerning their research productivity and their research career development?

1. Method

An a priori research protocol was written for this review, but not registered or published. We followed the steps of the Preferred Reporting Items of Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Hutton et al., 2015).

1.1. Information sources and search strategy

The electronic databases Cochrane Controlled Trial Register, PubMed, CINAHL, EMBASE, and The Cochrane Library were searched for eligible studies up to July 2014, which was later updated to January 2016. The following keywords were used: nurse, nursing, nurses, leadership, mentor, mentors, mentoring, mentorship, postdoc, postdoctoral, tenure, professor, professorship, faculty development, nurse faculty, research faculty, nursing research, and research career. References in relevant articles were hand-searched, and authors were contacted to access additional relevant publications (Table 1).

1.2. Inclusion criteria

Titles, abstracts and manuscripts were included if they met all inclusion criteria: (1) studies had designs relevant for the research questions and included quantitative outcome studies with (non) randomised controlled design, intervention studies, cross-sectional studies, descriptive studies and studies with a qualitative and mixed methods design; (2) studies investigated leadership programs and mentoring, reflecting important elements of leadership/mentoring; (3) studies included nurses with a doctoral degree; and (4) studies focused on outcomes including postdoctoral career development, research productivity in terms of publications, grant proposals, presentations and collaborations, as well as leadership knowledge and skills, nurses' health and well-being, staff relationships, work culture and collaboration, and salaries.

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