



Τεχνικές αποτελεσματικής ηγεσίας στα νοσηλευτικά ιδρύματα: ποιοτική μελέτη σε ελληνικό δημόσιο νοσοκομείο. Προσεγγίσεις πολιτικής και διοίκησης υγείας

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Εισαγωγή: Η νοσηλευτική ηγεσία συνδέεται στενά με την ποιότητα φροντίδας, την επαγγελματική ικανοποίηση και την παραμονή των νοσηλευτών στο επάγγελμα, στο ιδιαίτερα απαιτητικό περιβάλλον των Ελληνικών δημοσίων νοσοκομείων, όπου η υποστελέχωση, ο αυξημένος φόρτος εργασίας και η επαγγελματική εξουθένωση αποτελούν σοβαρά προβλήματα. Στο πλαίσιο αυτό, η διερεύνηση των συγκεκριμένων τεχνικών ηγεσίας που εφαρμόζονται στην καθημερινή κλινική πράξη αποκτά ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον.

Σκοπός: Σκοπός της μελέτης ήταν να εξετάσει ποιες τεχνικές αποτελεσματικής ηγεσίας χρησιμοποιούνται στις νοσηλευτικές υπηρεσίες ενός ελληνικού Γενικού Πανεπιστημιακού νοσοκομείου, όπως αυτές βιώνονται από τους νοσηλευτές, την προϊστάμενη και τη διευθύνουσα της νοσηλευτικής υπηρεσίας.

Υλικό και Μέθοδος: Πραγματοποιήθηκε ποιοτική, περιγραφική μελέτη σε Γενικό Πανεπιστημιακό Νοσοκομείο του ελληνικού δημόσιου συστήματος υγείας. Τα δεδομένα συλλέχθηκαν με ημι-δομημένες συνεντεύξεις από 25 μέλη του νοσηλευτικού προσωπικού, συμπεριλαμβανομένων νοσηλευτών, προϊσταμένης τμήματος και της διευθύνουσας της νοσηλευτικής υπηρεσίας. Η ανάλυση πραγματοποιήθηκε με θεματική ανάλυση, σύμφωνα με το πλαίσιο των Braun και Clarke.

Αποτελέσματα: Αναδείχθηκαν τέσσερις βασικές θεματικές: σαφής προσανατολισμός σε κοινούς στόχους και διαμοιραζόμενο όραμα, υποστηρικτική και σταθερή παρουσία του ηγέτη στην καθημερινή κλινική πράξη, ανοιχτή και ειλικρινής επικοινωνία σε συνδυασμό με υψηλή συναισθηματική νοημοσύνη, και η «ελπίδα για επιτυχία» ως κυρίαρχο κίνητρο όταν το ηγετικό στυλ είναι ενδυναμωτικό. Παράλληλα, η χρόνια υποστελέχωση, ο αυξημένος φόρτος εργασίας και η μη αναγνώριση της σωματικής και ψυχικής εξουθένωσης από τη διοίκηση αναδείχθηκαν ως βασικά οργανωτικά εμπόδια στην άσκηση αποτελεσματικής ηγεσίας.

Συμπεράσματα: Οι τεχνικές αποτελεσματικής νοσηλευτικής ηγεσίας στα δημόσια νοσοκομεία φαίνεται να στηρίζονται σε σαφή προσανατολισμό σε στόχους, ενίσχυση σχέσεων εμπιστοσύνης, συστηματική αναγνώριση της προσπάθειας και υψηλή συναισθηματική νοημοσύνη των νοσηλευτικών στελεχών. Ταυτόχρονα, η αντιμετώπιση των οργανωτικών εμποδίων που σχετίζονται με τη στελέχωση και τον φόρτο εργασίας είναι απαραίτητη προϋπόθεση για την εφαρμογή ενδυνάμωσης προσωπικού από την διοίκηση στην πράξη και για τη βελτίωση της ποιότητας φροντίδας και της ευημερίας των νοσηλευτών.

Λέξεις Κλειδιά: Νοσηλευτική ηγεσία, νοσηλευτική διοίκηση, ποιότητα φροντίδας υγείας, επαγγελματική εξουθένωσης (burnout), επαγγελματική ικανοποίηση.

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Effective leadership techniques in nursing institutions: A qualitative study in a Greek public hospital. Health policy and management approaches

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Nursing leadership is closely linked to the quality of care, job satisfaction and retention of nurses in the profession, especially in the demanding environment of Greek public hospitals, where understaffing, increased workload and burnout constitute serious challenges. In this context, the investigation of specific leadership techniques applied in daily clinical practice is of particular interest.

Aim: The purpose of the study was to examine which effective leadership techniques are used in the nursing services of a Greek General University Hospital, as experienced by the nurses, the head and the director of the nursing service.

Material and Method: A qualitative, descriptive study was conducted in a General University Hospital of the Greek public health system. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 25 members of the nursing staff, selected through purposive sampling, including nurses, a department head and a director of the nursing service. The analysis was carried out using thematic analysis, according to the framework of Braun and Clarke.

Results: Four main themes emerged: clear orientation towards common goals and a shared vision, supportive and consistent presence of the leader in daily clinical practice, open and honest communication combined with high emotional intelligence, and the "hope for success" as a dominant motivation when the leadership style is empowering. At the same time, chronic understaffing, increased workload and non-recognition of physical and mental exhaustion by management emerged as key organizational obstacles to the exercise of effective leadership.

Conclusions: Effective nursing leadership techniques in public hospitals appear to be based on clear goal orientation, strengthening trusting relationships, systematic recognition of effort and high emotional intelligence of nursing staff. At the same time, addressing organizational barriers related to staffing and workload is a necessary condition for implementing empowering leadership in practice and for improving the quality of care and well-being of nurses.

Keywords: Nursing leadership, nursing administration, quality of health care, burnout, job satisfaction.

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INTRODUCTION

Nursing leadership is internationally recognized as critical factor for care quality, patient safety, professional satisfaction, and nurse retention.¹ Contemporary literature highlights that the leadership styles and techniques adopted by nursing managers directly affect both patient experiences and nurses' working conditions, shaping the hospital environment climate and team collaboration levels.² Conditions in public healthcare are becoming increasingly complex, with rising clinical demands, higher morbidity, and the need for interdisciplinary care. The role of nursing leadership extends beyond daily task management and

encompasses strategic planning, human resource management, and support for staff psychological resilience.³

In the Greek public healthcare system, the challenges are similar and often more burdensome, as high workloads, material resources shortages, and organizational dysfunctions are persistent features of hospital reality.² Studies in hospitals have recorded high levels of stress and professional burnout among nursing staff, associated with demanding shifts, lack of support from management, and a sense that their efforts are not adequately recognized.² In such an environment, nursing leadership must



balance increased clinical needs, organizational pressures, and staff requirements, developing strategies that empower nurses and promote a climate of collaboration, trust, and safety.

International literature has demonstrated that appropriate leadership styles of nursing managers are closely linked to nurse well-being indicators, such as reduced burnout, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.⁴ Systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicate that supportive and empowering leadership enhances engagement, autonomy, sense of purpose, and commitment to the team's vision, while authoritarian leadership is associated with higher stress, conflict, and turnover intentions.⁴ Furthermore, the role of emotional intelligence in nursing leaders has emerged as crucial, as the ability to understand and manage staff emotions is associated with better communication and stronger organizational commitment.

Despite growing international evidence, in the Greek context, the qualitative exploration of how nurses and nursing managers experience leadership in daily clinical practice remains relatively limited.² Studying the experiences of the entire nursing service can reveal both the elements that characterize effective leadership and the organizational barriers that limit the implementation of the empowering practices.⁵ Understanding these is essential for designing health policy and

management interventions that substantively support nursing staff and contribute to improving care quality.

AIM

Against this background, the present study focuses on effective leadership techniques developed in a Greek public general university hospital from the perspective of nurses and nursing managers and investigates how leadership practices influence the work climate, team collaboration, and professional satisfaction of nursing staff.^{1,4}

MATERIAL AND METHOD

A qualitative, descriptive study was conducted, aiming for an in-depth understanding of leadership techniques as experienced in daily clinical practice. This approach was deemed appropriate because it focuses on the experiences and perceptions of nurses and nursing managers, allowing the exploration of complex phenomena in their natural context, without prior hypothesis formulation or testing.

The study took place in a general university hospital of the Greek public health system from January 25 to February 10, 2024, characterized by high patient flow and complex organizational demands. These conditions make the role of nursing leadership particularly critical for care organization, human resource management,

and staff support in an environment of intense workload and limited resources.

A total of 25 nursing staff members participated, selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with different roles, levels of experience, and positions in the organizational hierarchy. The sample included ward nurses, a head nurse, and the director of the nursing services to capture both frontline experiences and the perspective of administrative leadership. Inclusion criteria were: professional experience of 2 to 30 years, adequate knowledge of the Greek language, and voluntary participation. Those who did not meet these criteria or were unwilling to participate were excluded. Participant recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was reached, i.e. no new substantial themes emerged from additional interviews.

Data were collected using a questionnaire developed based on international and Greek literature on nursing leadership, effective nursing team management, and barriers to leadership practice.^{1,4} The thematic sections included:

- Perceptions of the role and characteristics of an effective nurse leader
- Specific leadership techniques and practices applied in daily work
- Factors facilitating or hindering leadership practice

- Effects of leadership practices on work climate, collaboration, and professional satisfaction

- Participants' suggestions for improving nursing management

Two open-ended questions encouraged rich and detailed narratives. Following written consent, questionnaires were completed in a quiet, suitable space within the hospital, at times that did not interfere with clinical duties. Completion took approximately 30-45 minutes per participant in a respectful, trusting, and non-judgmental environment, fostering a sense of safety and freedom of expression.

The study was approved by the hospital administration and the relevant ethics committee in accordance with national legislation, hospital regulations, and the Helsinki Declaration principles.⁶ Participants were fully informed about the purpose, process, potential benefits, voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured, and results are presented in aggregate form without identifying individuals or units.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's framework, including initial coding, grouping codes into candidate themes, reviewing and refining themes, and defining final thematic categories.^{7,8} Particular attention was given to identifying recurring patterns related to

leadership techniques such as communication, support, recognition, participative decision-making, and burnout management, as well as how these practices affected daily work and team climate. Analysis involved systematic recording of reflections and potential assumptions to enhance reliability and validity of the findings.^{8,9}

RESULTS

Analysis of the questionnaires revealed four main thematic categories reflecting how participants perceive and experience effective nursing leadership techniques in daily clinical practice:

1. Focus on Shared Goals and Vision

Participants described effective leadership as closely linked to a clear orientation toward shared, well-defined team and clinical goals. They emphasized that leaders should clearly articulate the unit's vision, communicate it systematically, and encourage nurses' participation in setting and achieving goals, so the team feels it is working toward a common purpose rather than fragmentarily. Nurses reported greater commitment and security when goals were realistic, understandable, and linked to care quality and patient safety, whereas lack of clear direction created confusion, inconsistent practices, and a sense of "improvisation" in daily work, a finding consistent with international studies on the leader as a carrier of clinical vision.^{10,11}

2. Supportive and Consistent Leader Presence in Daily Practice

A second central theme concerned nurses' need for leadership that is present and actively supportive in the clinical environment. Participants described a "good leader" as someone who works alongside the team, closely monitors workflow, intervenes when difficulties arise, and does not limit themselves to a formal supervisory role. The leader's consistent physical and psychological presence, availability for immediate support, and willingness to assist with workload were described as elements that reduce stress, enhance safety, and foster trust in leadership, aligning with studies linking supportive leadership to reduced turnover intention.¹¹ In contrast, distant, strictly controlling, or punitive leadership was associated with fear, caution, and reduced initiative among nurses, consistent with evidence that authoritarian leadership exacerbates burnout and team dysfunction.^{12,13}

3. Communication, Recognition, and Emotional Intelligence

Participants highlighted the importance of communication quality with nursing managers and leaders' ability to recognize and manage team emotions. They felt supported when leaders communicated clearly, honestly, and respectfully, listened actively to concerns, and created an environment where challenges could be

expressed without fear of criticism or stigma. Recognition of daily efforts through verbal praise, fair task distribution, and opportunities enhanced professional satisfaction and the sense that their work is valued, aligning with studies linking supportive leadership to increased job satisfaction and engagement.¹⁴ Moreover, participants emphasized the significance of leaders' emotional intelligence: the ability to perceive mental fatigue, show empathy, manage conflicts in ways that protect relationships and team climate, and foster a "hope for success" rather than fear and punishment. These dimensions correspond with findings linking nursing leaders' emotional intelligence to better communication, lower burnout, and stronger organizational commitment.^{15,16}

4. Organizational Barriers

Despite positive practices recognized in specific individuals, nurses described significant barriers limiting the practical implementation of empowering and supportive leadership. Chronic understaffing, high workload, lack of resources, and the frequent need to "cover gaps" with ad hoc solutions were reported as persistent pressures restricting time for communication, training, and staff support. These conditions intensified physical and mental exhaustion and limited leaders' ability to implement practices that genuinely empower teams, a

finding consistent with studies on workplace environment, leadership, and burnout.¹⁷ Additionally, many noted that senior management insufficiently recognizes nurses' fatigue, leading to feelings of injustice, frustration, and lack of appreciation, associated with higher intention to leave the profession.

DISCUSSION

Findings indicate that nurses perceive effective leadership primarily through trust relationships, open communication, and a clear, shared orientation toward specific clinical and organizational goals, consistent with international literature on nursing leadership's role in care quality and teamwork.¹⁻⁴ Participants emphasized that reducing uncertainty through timely and honest communication and the sense that the team is working toward a common vision enhances professional commitment and sense of purpose, a finding reported in studies on transformational and empowering leadership.¹⁴

The study also highlights the importance of the leader's consistent, supportive presence in the clinical environment beyond formal supervision. Nurses responded more positively to leadership styles combining clear guidance with availability, practical support, and encouragement, contrasting with rigid hierarchical models that restrict autonomy



and participation. Participants' reference to a "hope for success" when leaders are present and encouraging reflects core aspects of empowering leadership, where leaders activate intrinsic motivation, impart meaning to work, and strengthen commitment to the team and organization. These findings align with research linking supportive leadership to higher professional satisfaction and lower turnover intention.^{3,4}

The need for meaningful recognition and "human" communication with nursing administration emerged as particularly important. Participants associated effective leadership with the leader's ability to "sense the pulse" of the team, understand emotions, mental fatigue, and nurses' needs, and manage conflicts in ways that protect relationships and collaborative climate. These dimensions reflect emotional intelligence's role in nursing leadership, as research shows that higher leader emotional intelligence is associated with better communication, lower burnout, and stronger organizational commitment.^{15,16}

The results also underline the critical role of organizational context in effective leadership. Chronic understaffing, high workload, limited resources, and insufficient recognition by senior management were described as permanent pressures, burdening nurses and limiting leaders' ability to apply empowering practices.¹⁸ These findings align with recent

international and Greek studies demonstrating a close relationship between work environment, clinical leadership quality, and burnout and turnover intention among nurses.¹⁸

Finally, the qualitative insights from nurses, head nurse, and director provide an important voice in the currently limited Greek literature on nursing leadership.¹⁹ The emergence of "hope for success" as a central motivator under empowering leadership, as opposed to fear and punishment, expands understanding of how leadership practices affect nurses' psychological state and professional identity.¹⁸

CONCLUSIONS

This study showed that effective leadership is not a single trait but a set of interrelated practices and attitudes combining clear orientation toward shared goals, trust-based relationships, and supportive leader presence in daily clinical practice.

Participants emphasized the importance of recognizing their efforts, quality and honest communication, and high emotional intelligence in nursing leaders, which, as described, enhance safety, team collaboration, and professional satisfaction. In contrast, distant or punitive leadership was associated with fear, reduced initiative, and increased professional burnout, consistent with international studies linking authoritarian

leadership with adverse retention outcomes.^{3,4}

Strengthening nursing leadership in Greek public hospitals requires coordinated interventions at multiple levels. Individually, there is a need for systematic development of leadership, communication, and emotional skills in nursing managers through targeted training programs focusing on empowering leadership, conflict management, and burnout management. Organizationally and systemically, institutional recognition of nurses' contributions, improvement of staffing and work conditions, and fostering a collaborative culture between administration and nursing services are required to enable the practical implementation of supportive leadership.^{2,3,4}

The study highlights nurses as central pillars of the public healthcare system, whose daily efforts must be recognized and rewarded by nursing administration. A true leader is understood not only as a supervisor but as someone who stands alongside and ahead of the team, preventing problems, encouraging "hope for success," and creating a climate where nurses can work safely, with dignity, and professional fulfillment.

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