

Investing in the Front Line:

Preparing the Best Nursing Leaders for the Next Generation

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Development of nurse leaders needed to be accelerated, and there is a desire among nurses for strong development programs at all levels that would build confidence and prepare future nursing leaders for success. The Charge Nurse Leadership Certificate Program was designed to provide the needed resources and mentorship for frontline leaders. A pilot of this program in 18 facilities was associated with a 99% retention rate of program graduates and improvements in turnover, nurse satisfaction, and patient experience scores. Thus, this showed that effective engagement and development of frontline leaders can improve retention of these leaders and have a direct positive impact on nurses and, indirectly, on the delivery of patient care.

NURSES VOICE THEIR LEADERSHIP NEED

In today's health care environment, nursing leaders are faced with managing within an increasingly complex industry made even more challenging by a growing nurse shortage and increased pressures on hospitals. When a leader turns over, and there is an absent or weak pipeline, a gap can emerge that places key performance indicators and patient safety at risk. With an estimated 75% of nursing leaders expected to retire over the next few years,¹ it is critical that there are accelerated efforts to develop the next generation of nursing leaders and prepare them to effectively drive the nursing impact on health care's future state.

THE HCA HEALTHCARE VISION FOR NURSING LEADERSHIP

HCA Healthcare (HCA) is the largest nongovernmental provider of health care in the United States, employing over 80,000 registered nurses in over 180 affiliated hospitals. As a system, HCA is dedicated to improving care and being a leading employer of nurses.

In 2016, HCA conducted an engagement survey of all nurses to gauge their satisfaction, understand how the system could better serve and support staff, and hear ideas around innovation and excellence. Comments from this survey made evident the value that nurses placed on their frontline leaders. Nurses voiced the incredible impact that frontline leaders had

on their job satisfaction and the ability to deliver high quality care. However, there were not enough potential leaders currently available with the training necessary to succeed in both these roles and upper nursing leadership positions.

HCA senior nursing leaders identified gaps within the leadership pipeline, noting that there were a limited number of nurses able and equipped to step into vital leadership roles. With the changing environment and large number of retirements, it was evident that development of leaders needed to be accelerated and that this development would have to begin at the frontline

KEY POINTS

- **The development of strong and agile nursing leaders is becoming increasingly critical for the progression of nursing strategy and nursing care.**
- **A program designed with regard to the needs of frontline nurses successfully build skills needed for leading and career development.**
- **This program was associated with remarkable retention and improvements in nurse satisfaction and patient experience scores.**

level. Nurses articulated the need for strong development programs at all levels that would build confidence and prepare future nursing leaders for success.

The Charge Nurse Leadership Certificate Program was built on the basis of this feedback. This program was designed to provide the needed resources and mentorship for frontline leaders. The goal of this program was to equip leaders to lead in a way that promotes the effective care delivery, engagement, and retention within the HCA nursing workforce.

The vision of this program reflected the HCA commitment to unparalleled leadership development at all levels. Previous programs have recognized the incredible value of leadership development, such as the great successes from the HCA Nursing Director Development Program. Taking learnings from previous programs and best practices from within and outside of the organization, HCA developed the Charge Nurse Leadership Certificate Program to shape the next generation of nursing leaders.

HISTORY OF NURSING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AT HCA

In 2012, HCA created the Director Development Program (DDP) with the goal of “developing authentic, engaging, and exceptional nurse leaders who model the way.” The DDP curriculum has a heavy focus on quality, people, service, growth, finance, and community. The program is designed for up-and-coming directors within the company to prepare them to be successful in their leadership role.

The DDP results over the past 6 years have been impressive. Director turnover among program alumni is 66% lower than turnover among those who did not complete the program (2012 to 2018). Program alumni also had increased patient experience scores in 2017. Similarly, responses to the annual employee engagement survey revealed more satisfaction among program alumni than among those that did not complete the program.

Initial observations of the potential success of the DDP raised the question of whether there could be a similar impact on frontline leaders. By starting the development early on in their leadership progression, would a program like this provide the needed growth to have frontline nurses ready to fill critical nursing leadership roles in an accelerated time frame?

GOALS AND DESIGN OF THE CHARGE NURSE LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

The vision of the Charge Nurse Leadership Certificate Program was to build a program based on the voice of nurses. The program would incorporate what the frontline needed and wanted from a leadership perspective, with attention to meeting their needs and providing support for their careers.

The curriculum was designed to help facilities meet the following program goals:

1. Assist hospitals in improving retention, engagement, and patient experience scores by developing quality leaders for our nursing populations
2. Develop a quality pipeline of nurse leaders who are skilled and ready to move into nursing management and director roles
3. Close any leadership skill gaps amongst the current charge nurse population
4. Provide consistency in delivery of curriculum across the system with the goal of increasing the completion rate and creating a common skill set
5. Increase learning and engagement among participants using a cohort format

CURRICULUM OF THE CHARGE NURSE LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

The curriculum for this program was developed by the HCA Leadership Institute (a subset of the Leadership and Organizational Development team), in collaboration with the leadership training company VitalSmarts (Provo, Utah) and the workforce development company Catalyst Learning Company (Louisville, Kentucky).

In addition to using best practices identified in the DDP, the design team also reviewed practices that had been identified as “high impact” (i.e., significantly correlated with high performance) and were deliberate in ensuring the courses included these practices.

The final curriculum, which incorporates feedback from the first cohort of participants in 2016, consists of 8 in-person learning experiences, each 4 hours in length, and 1 online course, which is 0.5 hours of learning. Participants also receive 14 CEU credit hours when the program is completed.

Specifically, the program focuses on building skills in the areas of hospital operation, personal awareness of leadership strengths and development opportunities, and the successful leading of a team that achieves great results. The curriculum modules are described in [Table 1](#).

A PILOT PROGRAM WITH NOTABLE RESULTS

The Charge Nurse Certificate Program was piloted in the 18 facilities within the HCA Gulf Coast Division, which serves the greater Houston, Corpus Christi, and South Texas areas. All 800 charge nurses employed by these facilities are eligible for the program.

Between 2016 and 2018, 614 charge nurses enrolled in and completed the program. As of January 2019, 610 of these 614 nurses that completed this program are still with the company. This is a remarkable 99% retention rate since the pilot began ([Figure 1](#)).

A survey was provided to alumni about their experience with various aspects of the program, such as how this program prepared them as leaders and enabled them to lead change. The participants were asked to provide a level 1 evaluation for value of the program, ranking their perception from 1 (low value) to

Table 1. Curriculum Modules for the Charge Nurse Leadership Certificate Program

Module Name (Hours of Learning)	Module Description
<i>Leadership Fundamentals</i> (4)	<i>Leadership Fundamentals</i> outlines strategies to transition from staff nurse to charge nurse and explores the qualities of successful leadership. Participants analyze the patient care and financial implications for hospital value-based purchasing. Participants identify challenges and opportunities for leadership in their role to strengthen their leadership skills.
<i>Coaching for Excellence</i> (4)	Coaching is one of the most effective techniques business leaders and managers can employ to enhance individual and team performance. <i>Coaching for Excellence</i> is specifically designed to enable charge nurses to immediately coach their direct reports to higher levels of performance in order to achieve critical business objectives. This practical, hands-on course provides participants with the opportunity to practice coaching skills and learn how to apply a strategic process for moving their team's overall performance forward.
<i>Critical Thinking</i> (4)	<i>Critical Thinking</i> allows participants to differentiate decision making from critical thinking, recognize the traits of critical thinking skills, and demonstrate the application of critical thinking techniques.
<i>Crucial Conversations</i> (4)	<i>Crucial Conversations</i> teaches skills for creating alignment and agreement by fostering open dialogue around high-stakes, emotional, or risky topics—at all levels of the organization. By learning how to speak and be heard (and encouraging others to do the same), participants will surface the best ideas, make the highest-quality decisions, and then act on decisions with unity and commitment.
<i>HCA Vitals: web-based training</i> (0.5)	<i>HCA Vitals</i> provides participants with a “pulse check” into HCA's culture, values, vision, and brand. This course introduces participants to the “why and how” that differentiates HCA from other hospital companies. Participants hear about HCA's vision for the future from executive leaders themselves, as well as learn about initiatives designed to deliver the highest quality of care and provide an exceptional patient experience.
<i>Leading Change</i> (4)	<i>Leading Change</i> allows participants to recognize the drivers in the health care system, interpret reactions to change, implement strategies to improve staff productivity, and utilize change management. Participants practice collaborative leadership skills during change-related transitions.
<i>Supervisory Skills</i> (4)	<i>Supervisory Skills</i> helps participants identify communication strategies, understand a collaborative approach to conflict management, explore time management strategies, and demonstrate how to delegate while maintaining accountability. In addition, participants explore strategies to reduce hospital-acquired conditions.

5 (high value). The overall impression of the program was positive; participants rated the program an average of 4.62 out of 5.

These incredible results from the program alumni inspired further investigation into related metrics that would could be affected by these leaders. When surveyed at the division level (i.e., all 18 participating facilities in aggregate), there was a substantial decrease in RN turnover, both overall and among first-year nurses, between 2017 and 2018 (*Figure 1*). This correlates to the

time period when the majority of the program alumni had completed their training and were applying their skills and knowledge to their work. Similarly, there was a division-wide increase in patient experience and RN satisfaction scores over this same time period.

The results of this pilot showed that the effective engagement and development of frontline leaders by a health system can improve retention of these leaders and have a direct, positive impact on nurses and, indirectly, on the delivery of patient care.

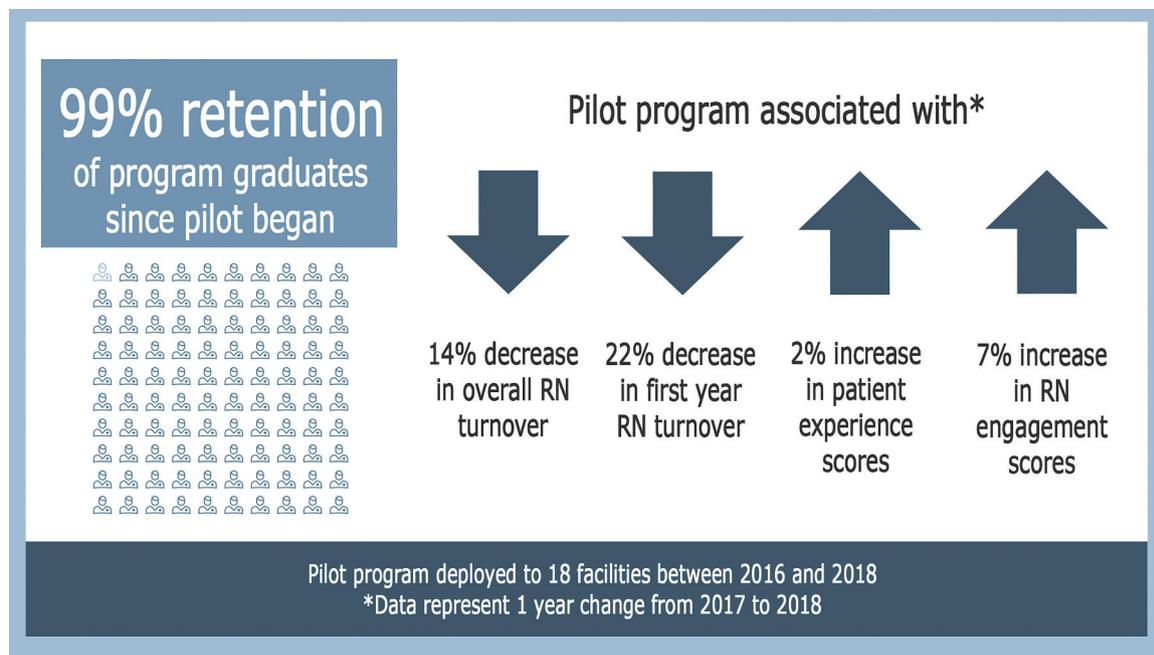


Figure 1. Results of Pilot Implementation of Charge Nurse Leadership Certificate Program

Summary

As the health care environment continues to change rapidly, the presence of strong and agile nursing leaders is becoming increasingly critical. The development of nursing leaders to be readily available for transitions will be vital in the progression of nursing strategy and nursing care.

The Charge Nurse Certificate Program showed the incredible value that can be captured by building programs based directly on the voice of the nurses. HCA nurses spoke to nursing leadership and expressed their perspectives about what was valuable to them, what would meet their needs, and what would provide them the most support. That information formed the foundation of this program and underlies its success.

The success of the Charge Nurse Certificate Program will be celebrated with the participants and will inspire future iterations of this program. The incredible engagement of the frontline leaders observed as a result of this program has provided a glimpse into the how this next generation of nursing leaders will reshape the future of nursing at HCA Healthcare.

Reference

1. Sanborn BJ. As baby boomer nurses retire, concern grows about national shortage. November 7, 2017. Healthcare Finance News. Available at: <https://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/news/baby-boomer-nurse-retire-concern-grows-about-national-shortage>. Accessed March 28, 2019.

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