



A Fellowship to Support the Transition of New Nurse Leaders

Suzanne Knight, DNP, RN, NPD-BC

Corinne Lee, DNP, RN, NPD-BC

Jole' Mowry, MSN, RN, NPD-BC

Alec Briggs, DNP, RN

Mark Erber, MSN, RN

Maria L. Bobo, DNP, RN, WHNP-BC, CENP, NPD-BC

The Nurse Leader Fellowship, a transition-to-practice program for nurse leaders accredited with distinction by the American Nurses Credentialing Center® Practice Transition Accreditation Program®, has successfully provided support and development to more than 200 nursing directors, managers, and supervisors during their transition to a new role and/or into the organization. The fellowship provides an organization-wide program for nurse leaders to develop core competencies that support their emerging roles through orientation, ongoing development, and networking. Program outcomes demonstrate its value to nurse leaders and to the organization.

Organizations are experiencing a shortage of nurse leaders in addition to the shortage of nurses providing direct patient care.¹⁻³ In a study by the NSI Nursing Solutions Inc, the 2023 nurse leader turnover rate was 9.5%.¹ Literature suggests that turnover of nurse leaders is a result of excessive workloads or work-life imbalance, a lack of support or poor relationships with superiors,^{2,3} and, most prevalently, a lack of structured onboarding or education.^{2,4} With an estimated quarter of the nursing workforce retiring within the next 5 years, many organizations are now hiring more leaders in the millennial generation.⁵ Therefore, organizations must

consider how onboarding processes can address the needs of multiple generations taking on the roles of nurse director, manager, and supervisor.

Among the top priorities for nurse leaders is role transition support. Organizations that lack transition support (such as structured onboarding, transition, and mentorship programs) are shown to have a higher likelihood of losing their leaders.^{3,6} Millennial leaders consider the level of transition support when making career-changing decisions that impact recruitment.⁶ If transition support is perceived as adequate by the candidate, the likelihood of accepting a position increases. This trait is not exclusive to millennials. When nurse leaders, regardless of age, are supported with adequate education or transition programs, there is an increase in satisfaction in the role,^{6,7} perceived competence,^{8,9} engagement,¹⁰ and retention.^{3,6,7} Therefore, the need for structured transition programs that guide new nurse leaders is highly evident.

To address this critical need, a Midwest academic medical center prioritized the development of a Nurse Leader Fellowship (NLF) that provides a proactive succession plan and ensures a pool of diverse, qualified nurse leaders who are inspired to lead their teams and advance nursing. The American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC's) Practice Transition Accreditation Program® (PTAP) provided the necessary criteria for developing the transition-to-practice (TTP) fellowship. This health system began its leadership program in 2015, and in 2018, the program became a TTP nurse leader fellowship in alignment with PTAP standards. The NLF was the 1st in the world to be accredited, with distinction, by ANCC PTAP in February 2020 and reaccredited in July 2023. Moreover, as a Magnet®-designated organization, the accredited NLF fulfilled the requirement within structural empowerment (SE11) to have a TTP program.¹¹ The highly successful NLF reflects the organization's commitment to their leaders,

Author Affiliations: Educational Nurse Specialists (Mowry, Drs. Knight and Lee), Staff Specialist (Erber), and Director of Nursing Professional Development and Education and Magnet Recognition Program (Dr Bobo), University of Michigan Health of Michigan Medicine; and Clinical Assistant Professor (Dr Briggs) University of Michigan School of Nursing, Ann Arbor.

In honor of Jole' Mowry, whose passion and commitment impacted this fellowship, the nurse leaders who attended the program, and the team who had the joy of working with her. Jole' will be deeply missed.

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Correspondence: Dr Lee, University of Michigan Health of Michigan Medicine, 300 N Ingalls Bldg, 6B17, Ann Arbor, MI 48109 (leeco@med.umich.edu).

DOI: 10.1097/NNA.0000000000001561

the hard work of a dedicated team, knowledgeable and engaging faculty, and the amazing contribution of the fellows who have attended and continue to support the program. This article provides a comprehensive view of a successful NLF that has achieved excellent outcomes and a guide for those who are starting the journey.

Fellowship Purpose and Goals

When developing the NLF's purpose and goals and reviewing/revising the program each year, it was important to align program goals with the strategic priorities and needs of the organization and nursing community, as well as the organization's mission, vision, and values. The purpose of the NLF is to develop the fellows' knowledge, skills, and abilities so they can thrive and be highly effective leaders in a complex, ever-changing health system.

Fellowship Overview

The NLF was established to ensure new nurse leaders experienced a successful transition into their role and responsibilities and to provide ongoing professional development and networking. The NLF is intended for all nurse managers, directors, and supervisors across the organization. This includes those promoted from within the organization and nurse leaders who are new employees in the health system. Fellows work in settings across the health system including, but not limited to, inpatient, ambulatory care, home care, and perioperative services. Having a centralized fellowship helps new leaders understand their role in supporting the organization's mission, vision, values, and priorities. It provides opportunities for fellows to meet other leaders from across the organization, share examples from their practice setting, discuss strategies, and develop enduring relationships and a strong network of colleagues. The fellowship currently consists of 3 parts: new nurse leader orientation (NNLO), nursing leadership development (NLD), and network.

New Nurse Leader Orientation

The NNLO offers a 2-all-day, in-person, structured orientation that provides the support and information new nurse leaders need in the 1st 100 days in their position while also creating a network of colleagues across the organization. The program is offered 3 to 4 times a year. NNLO was designed and presented in partnership with Nursing Professional Development and Education (PD&E), Human Resources, Finance, Nursing Recruitment and Retention, the nurses' union, and nurse managers across the organization. After completing NNLO, the fellow was eligible to attend NLD.

Nursing Leadership Development

The NLD program was created by PD&E in collaboration with established nurse leaders in the organization and other stakeholders. A new cohort of fellows is started twice a year, and the cohort meets for 7 in-person, 8-hour monthly sessions. PD&E facilitators ensure the content is relevant through participant feedback, and content is adjusted to meet the specific needs of each cohort and the nursing community. Content is presented in partnership with graduates of the fellowship and content experts from across the health system and the university campus. After graduation from NLD, the cohort attends network sessions to support their ongoing development and networking.

Network

The network sessions were added at the request of the fellows after the 1st NLD cohort completed the program; thus, PD&E scheduled 1- to 2-hour sessions every other month for 12 months. After cohort 2, fellows joined the previous cohorts in combined sessions to expand their network. Postpandemic, network sessions moved to hybrid, with some attending in person and others joining the session online. These sessions were held twice a year. Sessions were utilized for continued professional development, sharing of challenges they faced, and discussing strategies they used in the practice setting.

A Roadmap to Developing the Fellowship

The program was developed by PD&E, a centralized department that reports up to the chief nurse executive and serves all nurses across the health system. A lead team, composed of 4 nursing professional development practitioners in PD&E and the director of PD&E, provided leadership and oversight of the fellowship. Securing support from the nursing executive team was the 1st step to ensuring adequate resources and alignment with nursing's strategic priorities. During regular communications with the Nurse Executive Council (NEC) and stakeholders, updates and outcomes of the program were reported.

Developing the Curriculum

Leadership competencies and scope and standards guided the development of the curriculum, including the American Organization for Nurse Leaders (AONL) *Nurse Manager Competencies*,¹² American Nurses Association's (ANA's) *Nursing Administration: Scope and Standards of Practice*,¹³ and the Michigan Expectations Model,¹⁴ which is the framework for the organization's annual performance evaluation. The NLD topics were aligned with the ANA's Leadership Competency Model of leading self, leading others,

and leading the organization and supported the ANA's goal of developing transformational leaders.¹⁵

Program Content and Educational Methods

The lead team utilized current evidence, needs assessments, interviews, benchmarking, and best practices in educational methods to develop a robust curriculum and the program's structure, content, and evaluation. The team worked closely with stakeholders and subject matter experts to build the fellowship and ensure the content was relevant and actionable in the practice setting. All topics were presented by subject matter experts within the organization. As graduates of the fellowship became experienced leaders, they were invited to share their expertise and experiences as presenters in the program.

Program content was created and revised for each cohort as needed to improve the effectiveness of the education and meet the needs of the fellows. Although the topics continued to align with the AONL Nurse Manager Competencies,¹² ANA Scope and Standards for Nurse Administration,¹³ and Michigan Expectations Model,¹⁴ changes were made to provide more experiential learning, time to practice skills, and opportunities to debrief their experiences. Trends and priorities in healthcare, such as addressing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), also guided changes to the curriculum and content. Current evidence-based initiatives and practices in the organization were incorporated into the curriculum, which provided fellows with current information and relevant examples. The following describes a few key aspects of the fellowship program:

New Nurse Leader Orientation

The topics provided in NNLO are related to the daily roles and responsibilities of the director, manager, and supervisor. Topics include organizational/enterprise and nursing structure, institutional/nursing goals and priorities, Magnet designation program, employee engagement, nursing governance structure and unit-based committee, nursing quality and patient safety, accreditation readiness, role transition of nurse leaders, finance (scheduling, payroll, and attendance monitoring), life cycle of an employee from hiring to ongoing performance management, and union contract. During the 2-day orientation, the fellows met with the nurse executive leaders, as well as other nurse leaders to learn about their roles and expand their network.

Nursing Leadership Development

This part of the fellowship provided ongoing development of leadership competencies. Topics included, but were not limited to, self-awareness, integrity, adaptability (leading self), relationships, communication, coaching (leading others), business acumen, systems thinking,

and quality improvement (leading the organization). Resources within the organization and nationally were shared to promote ongoing development outside of the fellowship, and fellows were encouraged to create development goals with the person they report to. Additionally, nurses across the organization were encouraged to pursue certifications, and this was reinforced during the fellowship by sharing resources and asking fellows to share their experiences and strategies with their cohort. Often, fellows created a professional goal related to certification or formal education as part of the NLD program.

The 3 topics described below have been especially impactful and are critical to the development of our new leaders: self-care/wellness, leadership presence, and DEIB.

Self-care and Wellness

In fiscal year 2022 (July 2021–June 2022), postpandemic, the number of open leadership positions at the organization spiked dramatically as leaders retired or moved into other roles (eg, clinical nurse, risk management) due to burnout, relocation, or other personal reasons. The organization's employee engagement scores were reviewed and showed nurses and leaders were experiencing burnout at a high rate. Those concerning trends were also reflected nationally in the AONL COVID-19 Longitudinal Study August 2021 Report.¹⁶ Managers responded with 36% “not” or “not at all” emotionally healthy, and only 80% planned to stay in nursing.¹⁶ As a result, additional faculty were recruited to present relevant content throughout the fellowship, and the 1st session of NLD was moved to the university's Botanical Gardens, where fellows engaged in a mindfulness walk through indoor or outdoor gardens, depending on the time of year. Content included micropractices for self-care, empowering your team and setting boundaries so you are not working 24 hours a day, setting a personal goal related to well-being, developing supportive relationships and network, and an executive leader sharing their personal journey of resilience and prioritizing self-care. Self-care and stress reduction have been such an important topic for leaders that network sessions have expanded on this topic, it has been shared at various nursing leadership forums, and other groups have used the botanical gardens as a venue to give nurses an opportunity to practice mindfulness and relaxation.

Leadership Presence and Signature Voice

Leadership presence is reflected in how the fellow shows up every day and interacts effectively with others. Based on the book, *Own the Room: Discover your Signature Voice to Master Your Leadership Presence*,¹⁷ fellows determined when and with whom they used their driving voice, passive voice, supportive voice, and signature

voice. By gaining self-awareness about their communication styles in various situations, they were able to self-correct when they were not effective. The fellows gained presence and comfort speaking in front of others by standing up and introducing themselves when they spoke to the class, and on the last day of NLD, the fellows delivered a 4-minute presentation about their leadership journey and growth. This topic was so well-received that it was incorporated into the organization's educational nurse coordinator development program.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

DEIB content was enhanced for NLD cohort 7 and further expanded with cohort 8 to address a gap in knowledge and skills identified through self-assessments, anecdotal comments by leaders across nursing, and employee engagement scores. Incidents of bias, racism, and incivility had been reported in the organization, and leaders shared they did not always feel prepared or confident to manage the situation. Throughout NLD, there were didactic presentations, a virtual reality scenario,¹⁸ facilitated 1-on-1 role play scenarios with individualized feedback, small group activities, self-reflection, and discussions to enhance learning. This expanded content advanced nursing's strategic priorities related to DEIB and was so impactful that the DEI shared governance committee and NEC recommended that all nurse directors, managers, supervisors, and clinical nurse specialists receive a portion of the training in 2024.

Evaluation and Outcomes of the Program

Evaluation of the NLF provided valuable information for the lead team, presenters, and stakeholders. Honest

and constructive feedback was encouraged to assist in the continuous improvement of the fellowship. The outcomes were measured to ensure the goals of the NLF were achieved. As of June 2024, 11 cohorts completed the NLF (n = 198). Among them were nurse directors (n = 25), nurse managers (n = 4), nurse supervisors (n = 159), and advanced practice RN managers (n = 10). The outcomes in Table 1, NLF—Program Goals and Outcomes, represent NLD cohorts 1 to 11, except the number of certifications, which was tracked since 2021 (cohorts 7-11).

Fellows' Competency Assessment

The competency self-assessment, based on the AONL Nurse Manager Competencies,¹² was used during the fellowship to assess the needs and growth of the fellows' leadership skills. Prior to the 1st day of NLD, fellows were given an online survey link to a self-assessment where they rated their level of confidence for each competency on a 5-point Likert scale: “not confident at all” to “very confident.” The same assessment was completed at the end of the NLF. The outcome revealed a significant increase in the fellows' confidence in the leadership competencies ($P < 0.001$) from pre-NLD to post-NLD.

Postsession and Postprogram Evaluation Surveys

Postsession surveys were completed by the fellows to provide an evaluation of the content and presenters for each session of the program. Questions in the session evaluations focused on the helpfulness of content, whether activities enhanced the participant's learning, and effectiveness of the presenters. A 5-point Likert scale was used: “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Table 1. NLF—Program Goals and Outcomes (n = 198)

| Program Goals | Outcomes |
|---|--|
| Leadership abilities (perspective of fellow): There will be a minimum of a 20% increase in the overall mean scores of each cohort in the confidence level on the Leadership Competency Assessment from the pre-NLD self-assessment to post-NLD, as indicated by the fellow. | Preprogram: 3.15 Postprogram: 3.88 23% increase |
| Beneficial content and support: Provide beneficial content and leadership development support to fellows as evidenced by >90% satisfaction (“satisfied”/“very satisfied” or “agree”/“strongly agree”) on the postsession evaluations | Average of 95% satisfaction |
| Leadership/specialty certification: There will be a 20% increase in the number of leadership certifications (eg, CNML, NE-BC) and/or a certification in their specialty within 2 y of the fellows' completion of the fellowship. These data have been tracked since 2021 (n = 90). | Preprogram: - 34 specialty certifications - 2 leadership certifications Postprogram: - 35 specialty certifications - 15 leadership certifications 39% increase |
| Retention: In each cohort, we will retain 85% of nurse leaders 1 y after completing the fellowship. | Cohorts 1-7 (n = 125): average of 95% retention 1 y after completing the fellowship Cohorts 8-11 (n = 73; <1 y since they completed the program): as of June 2024, average of 98.5% retention after completing the fellowship |

Open-ended questions allowed the participant to describe how they will apply the knowledge/skills to their leadership role and suggestions for improvement. These questions were developed by the lead team based on requirements from the nursing continuing education provider unit. The postprogram survey questions were included in the survey at the last session of NLD. Questions focused on fellow satisfaction with the overall program, usefulness of the resources, preparation for their leadership role, and leadership skills developed during the fellowship. The outcomes showed high satisfaction with a 95% average agreement that the program provided beneficial content and leadership development support.

Leadership and Specialty Certifications

During the initial registration for the NLD program, fellows were asked about their current specialty and leadership certifications. Beginning in 2021, certifications were tracked after completion of the program to reflect the organization's priority to increase certifications. This showed a significant increase ($P = 0.02$).

Retention

The lead team worked closely with the department of nursing recruitment and retention to track retention data. They received a monthly report on the current positions held by nurse leaders, which included all those who completed the NLF. An average retention rate of 95% 1 year after the completion of the NLF was achieved for cohorts 1 to 7. Although cohorts 8 to 11 have not reached the 1-year mark since the completion of the NLF, only one fellow left due to relocation. Additionally, 85% of fellows since the start of the program in 2015 have remained in the organization as of June 2024. Six retired or relocated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, 17% of the fellows have advanced in their leadership positions (eg, from supervisor to director), with two advancing into an executive leadership role.

Discussion

The NLF has made a significant contribution to nurse leaders across the organization. It proactively addressed the need for orientation and role transition that strengthens the recruitment and retention of nurse

leaders.^{2,4,6} As a result, the NLF achieved a 95% average retention rate 1 year after program completion. The NLF has provided a strong foundation that inspires leaders to continue their development (leading self) as evidenced by a 39% increase in certifications and 17% of the fellows advancing in their leadership roles. Fellows are better prepared to nurture the development of their staff (leading others) and to ensure safe, high-quality care for the patients and communities they serve (leading the organization) as evidenced by a 23% increase in fellows' confidence in their leadership competencies. A strong transition program should also address the challenge of recruiting and retaining the next generation of nurse leaders.⁶ To address the unique needs of multiple generations of leaders, changes continue to be made to the program, including a mentoring program that is being piloted by a previous fellow who is now an executive nurse leader in the organization.^{4,6}

Conclusion

A TTP fellowship for nurse leaders is critical for the onboarding and continued growth of nurse leaders, as well as recruiting and retaining the next generation of leaders. Following the standards created by the ANCC PTAP ensured this fellowship was evidence-based and structured to meet the evolving needs in the practice environment. The NLF's structure allowed it to evolve as needs changed with national and organizational shifts in priorities, such as the focus on inequities and injustices in healthcare as well as self-care and stress reduction practices for leaders. The NLF has helped develop transformational leaders who "... inspire and stimulate followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and in the process, develop their own leadership capacity."^{15(p4)} Satisfaction and support for the program continue as fellows share the value of the program and ensure the incoming leaders are given the support they need to succeed and develop into impactful, transformational leaders.

Acknowledgment

The authors thank the Nursing Executive Council, the nurse leader fellows, and the many presenters for their significant support and contributions to the NLF.

References

1. NSI Nursing Solutions Inc. 2024 NSI National Health Care Retention & RN staffing report. March 2024. https://www.nsinursingsolutions.com/Documents/Library/NSI_National_Health_Care_Retention_Reportpdf. Accessed July 9, 2024.
2. Dolinta J, Freysteinson WM. Factors that influence nurse managers' intent to leave: an integrative literature review. *Nurs Manage*. 2023;54(7):32-42. doi:10.1097/nmg.0000000000000031.
3. Keith AC, Warshawsky N, Neff D, Loerzel V, Parchment J. Factors that influence nurse manager job satisfaction: an integrated literature review. *J Nurs Manag*. 2021;29(3):373-384. doi:10.1111/jonm.13165.
4. Pilat M, Merriam DH. Exploring the lived experiences of staff nurses transitioning to the nurse manager role. *J Nurs Adm*. 2019;49(10):509-513. doi:10.1097/NNA.0000000000000795.

5. Smiley R, Allgeyer R, Shobo Y, et al. The 2022 National Nursing Workforce Survey. *J Nurs Regul.* 2023;14(1):S1-S90. doi: 10.1016/S2155-8256(23)00047-9.
6. Sherman RO, Saifman H. Transitioning emerging leaders into nurse leader roles. *J Nurs Adm.* 2018;48(7/8):355-357. doi: 10.1097/NNA.0000000000000628.
7. Warshawsky NE, Wiggins AT, Rayens MK. The influence of the practice environment on nurse managers' job satisfaction and intent to leave. *J Nurs Adm.* 2016;46(10):501-507. doi: 10.1097/NNA.0000000000000393.
8. Coogan E, Hampton D. How does a new nurse manager orientation program impact competency and empowerment? *Nurs Manage.* 2020;51(12):22-27. doi:10.1097/01.NUMA.0000694864.13579.bc.
9. Welch TD. Do nurse managers feel competent in the financial and business aspects of their roles? Exploring self-perceptions. *J Nurs Adm.* 2022;52(5):286-292. doi:10.1097/NNA.0000000000001149.
10. LeJeune K. Enhancing nurse leadership engagement through formalized orientation programs: an integrative review. *J Nurs Adm.* 2023;53(7/8):415-419. doi:10.1097/NNA.0000000000001307.
11. American Nurses Credentialing Center Magnet Recognition Program. *Magnet Application Manual.* Vol. 2023. Ann Arbor, MI: American Nurses Credentialing Center; 2021.
12. American Organization for Nursing Leadership. *AONL nurse manager competencies.* AONE, AONL; 2015.
13. American Nurses Association. *Nursing Administration: Scope and Standards of Practice.* 2nd ed. Silver Spring, MD: ANA; 2016.
14. Michigan Expectations Model. 2023. https://hr.umich.edu/sites/default/files/final_mem.pdf. Accessed May 2, 2023.
15. American Nurses Association. Leadership Competency Model. 2018. <https://www.nursingworld.org/~4a0a2e/globalassets/docs/ce/177626-ana-leadership-booklet-new-final.pdf>. Accessed October 12, 2018.
16. American Organization for Nurse Leadership (AONL). COVID-19 Longitudinal Study. August 2021 Report. 2021. <https://www.aonl.org/system/files/media/file/2021/09/AONL%20COVID-19%20Longitudinal%203%20Written%20Report.pdf>. Accessed October 12, 2018.
17. Su A, Wilkins M. *Own the Room: Discover Your Signature Voice to Master Your Leadership Presence.* Ann Arbor, MI: Harvard Business Review Press; 2013.
18. Medvec B, Knight S, McLaughlin-Grayson T. Cultivating leadership competency using virtual reality: DEI and anti-racism. *J Interact Learn Res.* 2023;34(3):475-494.