

# Improving Nursing Leadership Communication: Fierce Conversations™ Training

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The National Academy of Medicine identifies nurse leaders as change agents who can improve the quality, efficiency, and safety of patient care. A literature review revealed associations among leadership styles that prioritize effective communication, increased accountability, and a just culture. A quality improvement project was designed to assess the impact of an educational intervention on nurse leader communication strategies. Results support leadership education about communication strategies, in-person facilitator-led education, and a structured approach to change.

## AT A GLANCE

- Nurse leaders are responsible and accountable for the nursing practices on their units.
- Communication strategies can be used to promote consistency and accountability.
- Improving communication skills requires education, practice, reflection, and integration of feedback.

## KEYWORDS

nursing leadership; communication; accountability; quality improvement;

## DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/23.CJON.255-258

In health care, communication is a key factor in patient safety (Anbari et al., 2019). In 2013, the Joint Commission identified poor communication as the root cause of 61% of sentinel events reported in a two-year period (Anbari et al., 2019). The Institute of Medicine (2011), now known as the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), published a report that identified clinical nurses and nurse leaders as change agents who can improve the quality, efficiency, and safety of patient care. It challenged nurses to develop a workplace culture that encourages and supports leaders and all members of the healthcare team to hold each other accountable for the team's performance (Institute of Medicine, 2011). The American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL, 2015) echoed the NAM by stating that the nurse leader's "role is influential in creating a professional environment and fostering a culture where interdisciplinary team members can contribute to optimal patient outcomes and grow professionally" (p. 3).

Nurse leaders are responsible and accountable for the nursing practices on their units. Technology has enhanced the safety and efficiency of nursing practice. It provides leaders with data regarding nurses' activities, including adherence to proper procedure and errors. These data can drive feedback and corrective action conversations. In reviewing data regarding high-risk errors, the Executive Nursing Council at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK) questioned how errors were being reported and resolved. Variations in leadership practices were discovered, which prompted a review of nursing leadership training, just culture, and accountability.

The NAM recommends a nonpunitive culture that reviews systems instead of individuals as a cause of errors (Barkell & Snyder, 2021). Known as just culture, this blame-free error reporting system has been used in the aviation industry since the 1970s to promote safety and reliability as an alternative to a punitive system (American Nurses Association [ANA], 2010; Paradiso & Sweeney, 2019). A just culture is an open and fair culture of learning based on trust, and it requires developing leadership competencies of communicating, resolving conflict, coaching, and holding staff accountable (ANA, 2010; Barkell & Snyder, 2021). A just culture is ideal for nursing units because it relies on critical thinking skills and aligns directly with the nursing processes of assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating (ANA, 2010).

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