Foreword

The Art of Nursing Leadership in a Challenging Patient Care Environment

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Long-term care is often thought to encompass the final stages of life for our aging and older adult population. The National Institute on Aging (2017)\(^1\) describes the intent of long-term care as meeting a person’s health and personal care needs through a variety of services. The goal of this specialized patient care is to help individuals live as independently and safely as possible when day-to-day activities have become challenging.

The phrase “long-term care” may bring the mental visualization of a nursing home or assisted living facility. Once in the facility, the person may receive assistance with toileting, bathing, dressing, grooming, and eating. All of these constitute “activities of daily living.” Long-term care also extends to adult daycare centers, community centers, transportation services, and meal preparation and delivery with a significant quantity of care often provided by unlicensed health care providers: the individual’s family members and loved ones.

The focus of attention is on the patient and their lived experience. However, there is an alternative side to the long-term care environment...the nursing side. The specialized care given to the older adult patient may be directed and/or provided by a certified nursing assistant, a licensed practical nurse, a registered nurse, or an advanced practice registered nurse. These nurses must deliver high-quality care to a patient population needing support for conditions such as dementia, debilitation, frailty, and palliative care. Serving as a nursing leader in such an environment requires an art not taught in the academic setting.

Nursing leadership in long-term care spans significant breadth, diversity, and environments outside of what is often considered nursing. It extends into the patient’s homes, among their family, and into the community. The challenges encountered by nurse leaders in the long-term care environment are unique and include leadership
development and sustainability, health care reform and reimbursement, geropsychiatric complexities, social isolation, and societal expectations of health outcomes. All of these must be continually appraised and readdressed in ways that are specific to the long-term care environment.

This issue, dedicated to the tireless efforts of the nursing leadership in long-term care, provides a unique perspective on not just the challenges facing nursing leadership in long-term care but also success strategies that can get nurse leaders to the next level.

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