



The Need to Optimize the Span of Control for Nurse Managers in Long-Term Care Setting

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ABSTRACT

The demand for the nursing home business is increasing due to the aging population in the United States, while the current nursing workforce across the country is short and not meeting the demand. Further, the workforce shortages during COVID-19 created a complex environment for Nurse managers (NMs) through additional workloads such as direct patient care, preventing turnover, and other rigorous administrative and clinical tasks, leading them to burnout in nursing homes. Also, it created unsafe working conditions for the nurses and nurse leaders, as evidenced by poor-quality outcomes and business closure. This article aims to identify the need to optimize the span of control for nurse managers and recommend strategies to reduce burnout to improve long-term care (LTC) outcomes and establish a safe environment for the stakeholders (residents, employees & shareholders).

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Introduction

The workforce challenges in the long-term care setting have been a known concern for several years. On the other hand, due to aging, the population over 65 and above is expected to increase to 94.7 million by 2060, which demands care in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. However, Covid has worsened the problem with increased workforce demand due to care needs. Further, COVID had every stakeholder pay the penalty in various aspects and left the healthcare care leaders in the nursing homes worried about organizational sustainability as they could not meet the care needs of the elderly population while lacking caring hands as evidenced by nursing home admissions were limited due to staff shortages and the closure of units further led to nursing homes losing 15.2% of their employees during the COVID [1]. Further, it increased the workload tremendously for nurse managers, who play a pivotal role in business survival by supporting the nurses and internal disciplinary teams, advocating for the resident's needs, and monitoring quality measures. As a result of the widened span of control for the nurse managers, such as providing direct care to cover the unit staff shortage, monitoring various programs, and dealing with external pressures over the administrative work, exhausted the nurse managers and led them to burnout and ineffective in their role. This article examines the requirement to revise the nurse manager's roles and responsibilities in nursing homes and recommends strategies to improve organizational sustainability.

Is there a need to optimize the span of control for nurse managers in the long-term care setting?

The concept of span of control (SOC) for nurse managers in the healthcare business is explained as the complexity of the role, such as the number of direct reports, required training for the direct reports, acuity of the resident population, ability of

the nurse manager and internal and external pressures of the organization. A widened span of control (SOC) for nurse managers results in burnout and draws adverse outcomes [2]. In applying the SOC concept to the LTC, nurse managers (NMs) (Registered nurses) play a significant role in providing clinical leadership, such as coordinating patient care with interdisciplinary teams, medical staff, vendors, and hospitals. In addition, NMs supervise unit staff, conduct employee/ resident investigations, and monitor programs such as infection control, wound care, psychotropics, and other quality control programs [3].

However, the ability of the nurse manager to perform these roles effectively depends on the organizational environment they are working in [3]. The facilities that have an environment with a poor support system, insufficient resources, and inadequate staffing levels may create a challenging environment for the NMs and utilize their time out of their role to cover the shortages, struggle to be resourceful and manage the more conflict environment. Further, it may lead to less morale, decrease the NM's ability to perform their tasks effectively, and limit their options to improve the quality outcomes (lower mortality, hospitalizations, customer satisfaction, fewer incidents/adverse events, low turnover rate) and longevity of the business. In addition, it is estimated that from 2008 to 2012, 22% of nursing home residents benefiting from Medicare were hospitalized due to adverse events, which cost \$2.8 billion more for the healthcare system [3]. An NM's role in preventing adverse events in the organization is crucial to achieving desirable quality outcomes. Therefore, SOC allows the NMs to build relationships with their team mentors and empower them to promote a culture of trust and self-accountability. It helps the compound productivity attain the organization's mission, whereas limiting the NM's ability with the role overload may lead to an unproductive and unsafe environment [4]. Therefore, it is imperative to reduce the heavy workloads to maintain the

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nurse manager turnover rate and promote the continuity of care.

Strategies to reduce Nurse manager burnout to improve LTC outcomes, therefore, sustainability

In the nursing homes or the hospital's chief nursing officers (CNO) evaluate the NM's SOC and enlist the guidelines for roles and responsibilities to improve accountability; therefore, it is recommended for the CNOs to consider the tool that is validated and reliable to make an effective decision about division of the labor according to the complexity of the tasks rather than only based on numbers. Establishing the NMs SOC depending on the numbers and full-time employees may cause negative impacts on the NMs that need support due to the complexity [5].

The nurse manager's retention plays a significant role in establishing a safe work environment for front-line employees and residents through the continuity of care and consistency in the work routine, allowing the teams to have common goals and improve outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to assist the managers with a wide span of control (WSOC) to take off the administrative responsibilities and allow them to build effective clinical teams to bring desirable clinical outcomes and increased productivity, which helps to enhance job satisfaction via improving the effectiveness in the NMs role [5].

Further, continuous leadership development programs and education for Nurse managers are needed to increase their confidence and change their perspective towards the workload. Also, leadership development programs may allow them to understand and learn the various leadership styles, give insight into the environment, and enable them to understand the required leadership style to improve collaborative teamwork, autonomy, and NMs' well-being by reducing workload and patient safety outcomes [5].

In addition, NMs who are conflicted in their role may end up with stress, which causes them to be disengaged. Therefore, it is imperative for the nurse executives to establish a meaningful role, mentorship and involve NMs in decision-making to increase the engagement and productivity for NM's. Further, establishing precise objectives, goals, and outcome excellence with the

recognition program and promotional strategies to motivate and sustain the NM's job satisfaction is recommended for the executive leadership [6].

In conclusion, nurse managers play a vital role in nursing home sustainability by establishing a safe environment for the employees and residents. Further, they play a crucial role in ensuring value-based and evidence-based care to improve safety outcomes, therefore, organizational success and generating revenue through their performance with 24/7 accountability. Further, expanding financial limitations by political and business bureaucracy tends to increase the nurse managers' span of control to combat budget constraints. However, researchers and healthcare administrators need to realize the need to optimize the NMs' span of control to achieve organizational sustainability and a healthy stakeholder environment.

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