

An Evidence-based Nursing Career Framework

Noreen Bernard, EdDc, MS, BSN, RN, NEA-BC,
and Cynthia A. Oster, PhD, RN, APRN, MBA, ACNS-BC, ANP, FAAN

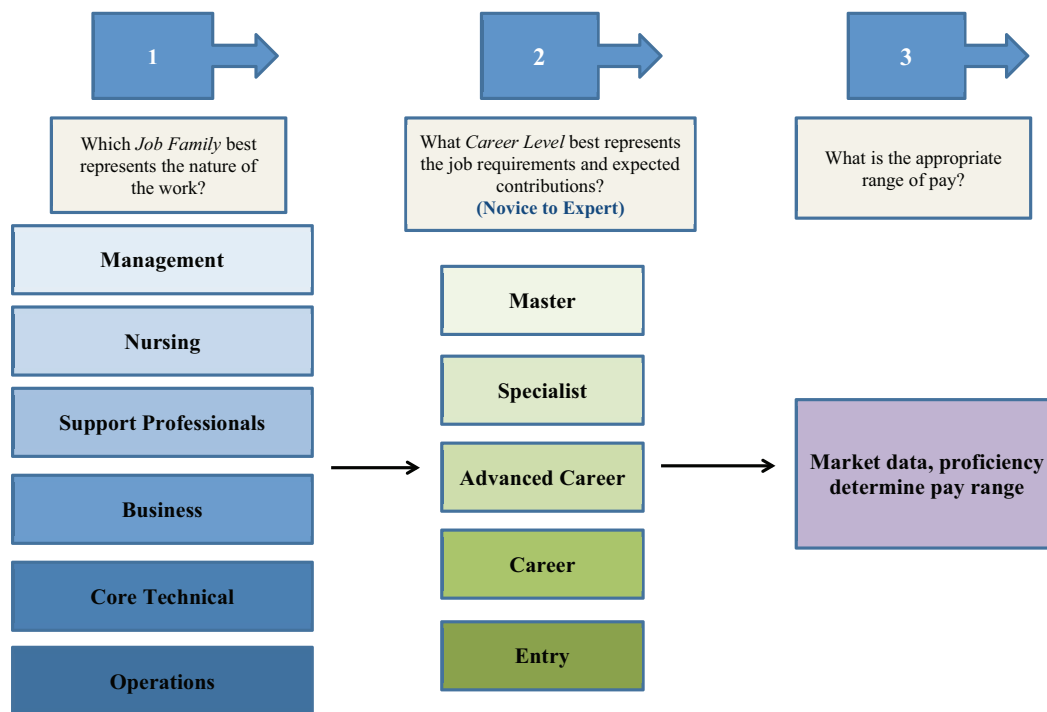
The Institute of Medicine (IOM) Future of Nursing report¹ calls on nurses to take a greater role in America's increasingly complex health care system. The number of registered nurses (RNs) needed to care for an aging and medically diverse population is challenging existing care delivery models and resources. Nationally, health care organizations desire to employ a workforce capable of meeting current and future demands while reducing costs and increasing value of services. One way to architect innovative workforce management is to implement a formal career development framework that meets both current and future career needs for nurses. Career management programs are associated with cost savings related to recruitment and retention through affiliated increased professional satisfaction.² Higher employee engagement leads to higher organizational performance, which is critical for business success and sustainability.³ Nurses connect with their organization in a variety of ways: socially with one another, intellectually through job challenges, and culturally through the mission and values of the institution.⁴ Affective and cognitive connection drives job embeddedness, which subsequently supports job satisfaction and reduced turnover.⁵⁻⁷ Professionals have a natural desire to learn, which provides a key leverage point for organizational success.³



Centura Health, Colorado's largest health care system, composed of 17 hospitals, multiple ambulatory care sites, homecare, and hospice, recognized the need to attract, retain, and engage RNs while planning for the impact of the national nursing workforce shortage. Centura Health designed a nursing career development framework with embedded Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) competencies as a workforce planning solution for nurses in all care settings and at all levels, including advanced practice

nursing, nursing education, and research. The model contains 5 career bands (each with similar jobs grouped together to form a job "family") and job levels that increase in complexity, responsibility, and proficiency (*Figure 1*). A well-designed, collaborative employer-employee professional nursing career framework functions as a guiding strategy for a RN's development and as a tool that sets the stage for when a RN's preparation for advancement coincides with the organization's opportunities and needs.² QSEN competencies address

Figure 1. The Career Framework Model



the challenge of engaging and employing nurses with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) necessary to continuously improve the quality and safety of the health care systems within which they work.^{8,9} The QSEN competencies are requisite components for clinical nurses to meet the needs of the 21st century health care system.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PROJECT

This project was developed as a long-term strategy to mitigate workforce shortages while working toward the IOM goal set forth in the Future of Nursing report. Further, opportunities to increase organizational performance through the use of standardization, systems thinking, and best practices aligned with the overall vision and goals for the health care system.

Evidence demonstrates urgency in addressing current and future nursing workforce needs, especially in specialty nursing areas. The career framework strategy provides a succession-planning pipeline and an engagement strategy for specialty nursing roles, advanced practice roles, education roles, and nursing research roles. Nurse engagement plays a significant role in workforce planning. In a study of experienced clinical RNs, only 37% reported full engagement, though 98.6% reported pride as a nurse.¹⁰ Learning, development, and challenging professional growth are reported to influence RNs' work engagement and subsequent work performance.¹¹ The career framework strategy provides a nursing development model and serves as an engagement tactic as nurse leaders work to architect professional practice environments. Additionally, increased job embeddedness positively influences retention through maintenance of the psychological contract.^{6,7}

Consideration for generational career needs is relevant for nurse executives and was an important element in the frame-

work development. Four generations of nurses currently coexist in the same work environment, each with unique characteristics and career values.¹² Understanding the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for each age group is important, with special emphasis on the Generation Y, the largest workforce since the Baby Boomers. Generation Y is estimated to comprise 50% of the nursing workforce by 2020.¹³ This age group has high organizational commitment when satisfied with their job, routinely monitor for new career opportunities, and value career challenge and higher education.¹²⁻¹⁴ Generation Y nurses have high expectations, work well on teams, and seek feedback and advancement.^{12,14,15} Thus, consideration for the newest nurses and future work force composition played an essential role in designing a nursing career development plan.

WHAT IS A CAREER FRAMEWORK?

Evidence supports that the nursing workforce sees the employer as a springboard to future roles and professional success.¹⁶ An organization committed to employee engagement, growth, development, and longevity understands the importance of providing an internal career path model as a strong retention strategy. A career framework is a model that provides the structures and processes for alignment of career levels, job families, and vertical and lateral growth opportunities to job descriptions, educational requirements, and relevant proficiencies for employees to visualize their career development map within the organization^{4,16,17} (Figure 1). In nursing, career development programs play a significant role in advancing nurses' professional practice, contributing to an organization, and generating job satisfaction through affective commitment.¹⁷ Benefits of a career framework include standardization of:

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