

## **Pulse Check: The Role of Leadership in Supporting Nurses' Well-Being**

WATSON, Adrianna and BOND, Carmel <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9945-8577>>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<https://shura.shu.ac.uk/34659/>

---

This document is the Accepted Version [AM]

### **Citation:**

WATSON, Adrianna and BOND, Carmel (2024). Pulse Check: The Role of Leadership in Supporting Nurses' Well-Being. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. [Article]

---

### **Copyright and re-use policy**

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

# Pulse Check: The Role of Leadership in Supporting Nurses' Well-Being

Dr. Adrianna Watson, Brigham Young University, Utah, USA

Dr. Carmel Bond, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted severe impacts on nurses, driven by chronic staffing shortages, escalating patient care demands, and insufficient support structures (Appleton et al., 2023; Han & Jiang, 2023; Jarden et al., 2023; Jeffs et al., 2024; Watson, 2024). Nurses reported feeling undervalued and distressed from excessive workloads, especially in high-pressured settings like Intensive Care Units (ICUs), where inadequate staffing levels and high patient acuity exacerbated these challenges (Jeffs et al., 2024; Watson, 2024). The nursing workforce continues to show troubling signs of decline, with rising levels of psychological distress, burnout, and turnover rates (Galanis et al., 2024). These trends pose substantial risks to team dynamics, the quality of patient care, and the long-term viability of healthcare systems. Such risks emphasize an urgent need for supportive leadership and sustainable work environments to counteract these stressors and improve resilience across the profession (Niinihuhta et al., 2022).

In the past two years, the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* has published numerous articles underscoring the critical role of leadership in supporting nurses' well-being. This virtual issue features eight studies demonstrating how effective leadership enhances nurses' mental health, resilience, and job satisfaction.

## **The Heart of Healthcare**

Leadership in healthcare is undeniably central to fostering nurse well-being, team cohesion, and, ultimately, effective patient care. Holtan et al (2024) illustrate that leaders who

support autonomy, encouraging nurses' independence and addressing core psychological needs, significantly boosts intrinsic motivation, resilience, and job satisfaction. This creates a healthier, more engaged workforce. Conversely, controlling leadership styles have been linked to increased stress levels and reduced motivation, highlighting the importance of supportive approaches in leadership roles (Holtan et al., 2024).

Leaders who demonstrate humility may set a tone of openness and approachability. Mrayyan and Al-Rjoub (2024) emphasized how humility in leaders is valued by nurses but doesn't independently contribute to psychological safety. Instead, organizational climate and structured support systems appear essential for cultivating a safe and open environment. Still, other organizational practices, such as quality improvement initiatives, have been shown to substantially impact team psychological safety more (Mrayyan & Al-Rjoub, 2024).

Innovative leadership strategies, such as humour-based leadership, can also positively impact team dynamics and collaboration. Han & Jiang (2023) have shown that managerial humour increases feelings of energy among nurses, which, in turn, promotes coworker-directed helping behaviours. This effect is particularly strong among nurses with a high power distance orientation, who tend to respond more positively to hierarchical cues (Han & Jiang, 2023). This insight suggests that humour, when used appropriately, may be an effective leadership tool for enhancing both nurse morale and collaborative behaviour, especially in culturally diverse teams (Han & Jiang, 2023).

Paternalistic leadership, another leadership style typical in hierarchical cultures, exhibits mixed effects. While moral aspects of paternalistic leadership correlate with decreased perceptions of workplace bullying, authoritarian approaches within the same style have been linked to higher levels of perceived bullying among nurses. This dichotomy indicates that while some paternalistic elements may create a protective environment, overly authoritarian practices can diminish team trust and safety (Peng et al., 2024). Findings

underscore the need for balanced, compassionate leadership supporting (rather than controlling), fostering a culture of trust and mutual respect.

These studies underscore the importance of supportive, respectful, and culturally aware leadership in nursing, emphasizing autonomy and psychological safety. Leaders who adopt these practices can enhance nurse well-being, strengthen team resilience, and improve patient care outcomes (Huang et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2023; Jarden et al., 2023).

### **Environmental Risk Factors**

Nurses' perceived support within healthcare institutions is pivotal in shaping their psychological well-being and fortitude in facing challenges. Xiao et al (2023) have shown that organizational support is crucial to nurses' mental health and resilience. They advocate work-life balance (WLB) programs, which prove effective in reducing burnout and boosting job satisfaction. Such programs positively influence psychological well-being, especially when they align with a culture encouraging nurse learning and personal growth (Xiao et al., 2023). However, while anticipated to amplify the impact of WLB programs, servant leadership styles did not show significant moderating effects, indicating that the structure and intent of support programs play a more critical role than leadership style alone in this context (Xiao et al., 2023). Huang et al (2023) argue perceived organizational support (POS) is essential, especially for emergency nurses facing workplace violence, as it fosters resilience through cognitive reappraisal (a reframing technique that strengthens self-efficacy).

The organizational climate helps buffer negative leadership traits. For example, Peng et al (2024) discuss how a positive work culture can reduce bullying perceptions associated with authoritarian paternalistic leadership, while a cohesive climate promotes respect and aligns with organizational values. Quality improvement initiatives, however, can strain teams if perceived as adding workload without support, showing there is a need for balanced implementation (Mrayyan & Al-Rjoub, 2024). Together, these findings highlight the urgent

need for healthcare organizations to cultivate a supportive, resilient culture that values nurse well-being, thereby strengthening patient care and workforce sustainability (Holtan et al., 2024; Jarden et al., 2023).

These studies highlight the need for a supportive organizational climate to boost nurse well-being. Aligning supportive programs with a commitment to empathy, resilience, and respect, healthcare organizations can help prevent burnout, reduce workplace stress, and build a more resilient, patient-centred workforce (Holtan et al., 2024; Jarden et al., 2023).

### **Systemic Factors of Allostasis vs. Homeostasis**

Nursing is physically and emotionally demanding, requiring resilience strategies that go beyond individual effort. Huang et al (2023) suggest a combination of organizational support and personal coping strategies. Cognitive reappraisal is one strategy that enables nurses to reinterpret stressors, reducing their emotional toll. This is especially effective in high-stress environments such as emergency care. Organizations can amplify resilience by fostering environments that encourage this approach, helping retain staff and reduce burnout.

Self-efficacy (nurses' confidence in handling workplace challenges) is another aspect of resilience that is strengthened by organizational support, creating a positive feedback loop that diminishes stress-related turnover. Also, Appleton et al (2024) note how peer support contributes greatly, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, where healthcare workers found emotional stability through shared experiences and mutual understanding. Peer support is stressed as a way of promoting sustainable resilience.

Xiao et al (2023) explain how work-life balance (WLB) programs improve nurses' mental health and job satisfaction, especially within growth-oriented cultures, reducing burnout and strengthening personal resilience for those in very demanding roles. Leadership strategies tailored to team dynamics can also enhance resilience; for instance, managerial humor boosts morale and promotes collaboration, especially in hierarchical teams where it

alleviates stress and fosters supportive interactions (Han & Jiang, 2023). Together, these insights advocate for comprehensive, culturally sensitive resilience initiatives that reinforce both individual and team well-being in nursing.

### **Conclusion**

The insights presented in this virtual issue highlight the importance of nurse well-being. Contributing factors to a stable nursing workforce include supportive leadership, positive organizational climates, and resilience-focused interventions. The evidence underscores that nurse wellbeing is not merely an individual responsibility but a collective organizational priority, essential for fostering high-quality patient care and long-term retention. In integrating these proven strategies, organizations and colleagues may create environments where nurses are valued, supported, and empowered to thrive amidst challenges. We recommend that future research explore best practices for further supporting and enhancing nurse well-being.

*After all, what is any system without its lifeblood?*

## References

- Appleton, L., Atkins, C., Watmough, S., Cherry, M. G., & Poole, H. (2023). Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on the psychological well-being of oncology healthcare professionals. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 79(10), 3787–3799.
- Galanis, P., Moisoglou, I., Katsiroumpa, A., Vraka, I., Siskou, O., Konstantakopoulou, O., & Kaitelidou, D. (2024). Moral Resilience Reduces Levels of Quiet Quitting, Job Burnout, and Turnover Intention among Nurses: Evidence in the Post COVID-19 Era. *Nursing Reports*, 14(1), 254-266.
- Han, C., & Jiang, P. (2023). Motivating nurses' coworker-directed helping behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic: Role of managerial humour and nurses' power distance orientation. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 79(6), 2293–2304.
- Holtan, K. H., Halvari, A. E. M., Olafsen, A. H., Øvergård, K. I., & Halvari, H. (2024). The role of leadership in nurses' wellbeing and performance: A cross-sectional survey using a dual motivational pathway model. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*.
- Huang, H., Su, Y., Liao, L., Li, R., & Wang, L. (2024). Perceived organizational support, self-efficacy and cognitive reappraisal on resilience in emergency nurses who sustained workplace violence: A mediation analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 80(6), 2379–2391.
- Jarden, R. J., Scott, S., Rickard, N., Long, K., Burke, S., Morrison, M., Mills, L., Barker, E., Sharma, K., & Twomey, B. (2023). Factors contributing to nurse resignation during COVID-19: A qualitative descriptive study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 79(7), 2484–2501.
- Jeffs, L., Heeney, N., Johnstone, J., Hunter, J., Loftus, C.A., Ginty, L., Greenberg, R., Wiesenfeld, L. and Maunder, R. (2024). Long-term impact of COVID-19 pandemic:

Moral tensions, distress, and injuries of healthcare workers. *Plos one*, 19(9), p.e0298615.

Mrayyan, M. T., & Al-Rjoub, S. (2024). Does nursing leaders' humility leadership associate with nursing team members' psychological safety? A cross-sectional online survey. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*.

Niinihuhta, M., & Häggman-Laitila, A. (2022). A systematic review of the relationships between nurse leaders' leadership styles and nurses' work-related well-being. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 28(5), e13040

Peng, X., Zeng, Q., Yang, D., Cheng, Y., Zhao, S., Song, J., Qin, Y., Gao, Z., Chen, Y., Zhang, F., & Huang, L. (2024). Association of nurse managers' paternalistic leadership and nurses' perceived workplace bullying: The mediating effect of organizational climate. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*.

Watson, A. (2024). The evolution of professional identity in intensive care nurses during COVID-19 - An interpretive phenomenological study. *Intensive and Critical Care Nursing*, 80, 103538. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iccn.2023.103538>

Xiao, Q., Liang, X., Liu, L., Klarin, A., & Zhang, C. (2023). How do work–life balance programmes influence nurses' psychological well-being? The role of servant leadership and learning goal orientation. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 79(7), 2720–2731.