

## CHAPTER 3 - DEVELOPING, SUSTAINING, AND RETAINING NURSES IN THEIR CAREERS

### Strategy 13

Create robust systems that involve nurses as leaders in decision-making that impacts their work environment, patients, and the interprofessional team

**Strategy 13.1** Hospitals and health systems should create or sustain unit councils and hospital-wide shared governance councils that value nurse leadership in decision-making.

#### Desired Result

Nurses will be meaningfully engaged and valued in decision-making about practices and policies at the unit and organizational levels.

#### Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

By embracing shared governance, health care organizations can ensure that they are leveraging the full potential of their nursing staff to meet the challenges of modern health care delivery. Unit councils and other shared governance structures should provide a platform for nurses to suggest and make decisions regarding care delivery and process improvements. The task force encourages hospital leadership to include nurse leaders, clinical nurses (both RNs and LPNs), and nursing assistants representing different areas of practice in shared governance structures. This is an important aspect of valuing the role and professional experience that nurses bring to patient care and the success of the organization as a whole.

**“Shared governance in nursing is a professional practice model that promotes shared decision-making and nursing empowerment by making nurses accountable for decisions impacting processes, policies, and procedures at the point of patient care. The nurse’s role in shared governance is to utilize clinical expertise and knowledge to help find solutions to problems or issues within their department or organization, acting as part of a council or team.”**

- Faubion D. What is shared governance? [www.nursingprocess.org/shared-governance-in-nursing.html](http://www.nursingprocess.org/shared-governance-in-nursing.html)

**A unit council is responsible for making nursing practice decisions for that unit.**

-EBSCO Health. Empowering Nurses: Tips and Tricks for Implementing Shared Governance. <https://www.ebsco.com/sites/g/files/nabnos191/files/acquiadam-assets/Empowering-Nurses-Shared-Governance-eBrochure.pdf>

#### Related Recommendations from Other Groups

**Nurse Staffing Task Force. Nurse Staffing Task Force Imperatives, Recommendations, and Actions. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses and American Nurses Association; 2023**

**Recommendation: Establish empowered professional governance committees that include direct-care nurses and have authority to create and sustain flexible staffing approaches.**

#### Context

Hospital unit councils and other forms of shared governance play a pivotal role in empowering nurses to be actively involved in decision-making processes related to their workplace, patient care, and health care team performance. These councils and governance structures offer a platform for nurses at all levels to voice their opinions, share expertise, and contribute to the development and implementation of policies and procedures. Shared governance plays an essential part in the “Journey to Magnet Excellence”<sup>1</sup> by transforming culture through creation of “infrastructure to support programs such as shared governance, quality improvement, peer review, evidence-based practice, collegial teamwork, nursing research, etc.”<sup>44</sup> The importance of such participatory frameworks cannot be overstated, as they bring numerous benefits, including:

- **Empowering Nurses** - Shared governance structures such as hospital unit councils empower nurses as crucial stakeholders in the health care delivery system. Involvement in decision-making enables nurse voices to be a key factor in organizational change and improvement.
- **Enhancing Job Satisfaction and Retention** - Involvement in shared governance contributes to job satisfaction by having a voice in decisions that affect nurses’ daily work lives and the care they provide to patients. Increased job satisfaction can lead to higher retention rates, as nurses are more likely to remain in positions where they feel valued and heard. In an era where nurse retention is a critical challenge, fostering a culture of meaningful shared governance can be a key strategy for health care organizations to maintain a stable and experienced workforce.
- **Improving Patient Care** - Nurses are on the frontline of patient care, giving them unique insights into patient needs, the effectiveness of care practices, and areas for improvement. By valuing nurses in decision-making, hospitals can leverage their unique perspective to develop and refine care protocols, enhance patient safety, and ensure that care delivery is both patient-centered and evidence-based. This collaborative approach can lead to better patient outcomes, increased patient satisfaction, and a stronger reputation for the organization.
- **Fostering Professional Development** - Participation in shared governance structures offers nurses opportunities for professional development and growth. It allows them to build leadership skills, engage in problem-solving, and understand the broader organizational and health care context. These experiences can be instrumental in preparing nurses for advanced roles within the organization, including management and leadership positions. By

<sup>1</sup> “The Magnet Recognition Program designates organizations worldwide where nursing leaders successfully align their nursing strategic goals to improve the organization’s patient outcomes. The Magnet Recognition Program provides a roadmap to nursing excellence, which benefits the whole of an organization.” - <https://www.nursingworld.org/organizational-programs/magnet/>

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investing in the development of its nursing staff, a hospital not only enhances its operational efficiency but also ensures a pipeline of skilled leaders for the future.

- **Encouraging Innovation and Efficiency** - Nurses, who are intimately familiar with the intricacies of patient care processes and the challenges of the work environment, can offer practical, innovative solutions to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Their hands-on experience is invaluable in identifying areas where processes can be streamlined, resources can be better utilized, and patient care can be delivered more effectively.
- **Building a Collaborative Culture** - By fostering open communication and collective decision-making, shared governance structures can help break down silos within the organization, promoting a more integrated approach to health care delivery. This collaborative culture not only enhances the work environment for nurses but also improves interdisciplinary teamwork, which is essential for comprehensive patient care.

## EVIDENCE OF THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF SHARED GOVERNANCE

A study that measured the association between the level of engagement of nurses with hospital committees/governance structures and both patient and nurse workplace satisfaction identified significant positive impacts of greater nurse engagement (see figure to the right). The study found the largest effects of nurse engagement included an increased likelihood of patients recommending the hospital and, among nurses, decreased burnout and interest in leaving the organization.<sup>45</sup> Another recent study showed consistent findings, with greater nurse empowerment in decision-making associated with superior patient and nurse workplace satisfaction scores.<sup>46</sup>

Study authors suggest that there is a “business case for the involvement of nurses in institutional decision-making especially because of the current focus on [value-based payment] and cost-containment”.<sup>45</sup> Because of the role that patient satisfaction surveys play in the level of hospital payment in value-based payment models through the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, an increase in patient satisfaction can make a significant difference in payment.

*“Hospitals that provide nurses with the greatest opportunities to be engaged in [shared governance] are more likely to provide better patient experiences, superior quality of care, and have more favorable nurse job outcomes compared to hospitals where nurses are not engaged in institutional decision-making.”*

-Kutney-Lee A, et. al. Nurse Engagement in Shared Governance and Patient and Nurse Outcomes. J Nurs Adm. 2016 Nov;46(11):605-612. doi: 10.1097/NNA.0000000000000412.

## Impacts of Nurse Engagement in Hospital Governance\*



MOST ENGAGED		LEAST ENGAGED
13%	Very dissatisfied with their jobs	43%
23%	High burnout	52%
8%	Planning to leave employer within 1 year	24%
8%	Described quality of care on their unit as fair or poor	33%
2%	Graded patient safety as poor or failing	15%
77%	Management will resolve problems in patient care	39%

\*“Least engaged” nurses reported not having the opportunity to serve on hospital committees; “somewhat engaged” nurses reported having the opportunity to serve on hospital committees; “moderately engaged” nurses reported involvement in hospital governance; and “most engaged” nurses reported having the opportunity to participate in policy decisions.”

Source: Kutney-Lee A, et. al. Nurse Engagement in Shared Governance and Patient and Nurse Outcomes. J Nurs Adm. 2016 Nov;46(11):605-612. doi: 10.1097/NNA.0000000000000412.

## Spotlight on North Carolina

*“At Atrium Health Stanly, we take the voice of the nurse very seriously. When I first came to the facility as the Chief Nursing Officer, there was very little shared governance. Decisions were made at the leader level with very little input from the frontline staff nurse level. Initially, we started building the structure of our shared governance model and identifying staff nurses from each unit to be the representatives and voice of the nurses at the table. Over time, we were able to demonstrate wins by listening to what nurses needed and letting them know their voices were being heard. Over the course of five years, we increased the participation of staff nurses on the shared governance council by 300%. In that same timeframe, we decreased the number of nursing leaders on the shared governance council by 71%, which was the goal. Now the council was truly led and driven by staff nurses.*

*An example of showing how the voice of the nurse is so important to us here at Atrium Health Stanly was exemplified when our Intensive Care Unit (ICU) renovation kickoff meeting was held with stakeholders including construction, design team, safety, plant operations, information technology, and administration. An ICU bedside nurse was invited to attend the meeting. At the last minute, she was unable to attend. The Chief Nursing Officer cancelled the meeting since the ICU nurse was not there. She stated there would be no decisions made without the voice of the nurse being at the table. While this did not make the rest of the team happy, it demonstrated the commitment to the importance of having the input of the bedside nurse heard when making decisions about workflow that would impact nursing and their day-to-day job.”*

-Personal communication. Chief Nursing Officer II, Atrium Health Stanly, Marietta Abernathy. April 4, 2024.