



Case Story: The Impact of Intentional Professional Leadership Development on an Emerging Nurse Executive

Soaring nurse executive turnover rates amplify the need for intentional professional development for an emerging nurse executive.

At a time in healthcare when there is no more business as usual, motivating team members and producing desired results require strategic savvy. The challenges confronting nurse executives today have never been more complex. Both inward self-discernment and outward knowledge of the business of healthcare are top leadership priorities.

When the Director of Perioperative Services at a tertiary care hospital on the east coast accepted the Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) role, she received virtually no orientation with the outgoing CNO. While this leader was highly capable, there were immediate opportunities to strengthen her leadership skills and executive presence that would be essential for her to deliver desired results. The stakes were high in this Level II trauma center. Strong and effective nurse leadership would be required for the organization to maintain its Leapfrog “A” grade.



The Opportunity

When the long-standing CNO in this organization stepped down, the Director of PeriOperative Services eagerly interviewed and ultimately accepted the new role. Stakeholders agreed that the newly appointed and first-time CNO would need a highly structured and meaningful onboarding plan. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the outgoing CNO could not provide this support. The newly appointed CNO was rightfully concerned about how she would navigate the challenges of the new role with such limited preparation.

Importantly, the newly onboarded CNO wasn't the only one worried. The new hospital President also had concerns. The new CNO had been selected by her predecessor prior to the President's arrival, and he was not certain that she was role ready. The President wanted to provide the new CNO the best opportunity to succeed. He committed to supporting her growth into the new role and accelerating development of her leadership skills and financial acumen.

“My ultimate concern is that the newly onboarded CNO will be able to successfully transition from a perioperative director role to a highly effective CNO.”

-Hospital President

The Solution

Informed by an extensive review of the literature and a survey of nurse executives across the country, Kirby Bates Associates (KBA) designed a contemporary, intentional executive leadership development program focused on aspiring and current nurse leaders with three chief aims:

- Accelerate the transition to an experienced and effective nurse executive
- Provide the support and transferable knowledge required to reduce knowledge gaps
- Achieve self-development goals and organizational imperatives.

While some knowledge can be learned in a book or through conference participation, most knowledge is gained through experiential learning in which the learner purposefully engages with others in direct experience and focused reflection. This approach increases knowledge, develops skills, and clarifies self and organizational values.

KBA nursing leadership experts have mastered the process, deploying experienced nurse executive advisors to guide nurse leaders through a customized curriculum while actively working on real-time challenges in their organization. This unique approach of intentional professional development addresses the knowledge and experience gaps we are currently realizing in our healthcare environments today.

Identified Leadership Development Goals: CNO

- Emerge as a strong nurse executive with professional presence and financial acumen
- Retain and recruit top nursing leadership talent
- Develop and operationalize an organizationally aligned and meaningful Professional Leadership Development Plan.



“One of my favorite activities was developing my own leadership development plan. It required me to take an introspective look at my professional life and why I wanted this position.”

-Chief Nursing Officer

The Results

The engagement goals were fully achieved within the planned six-month engagement.



GOAL: Emerge as a strong nurse executive with financial and professional business acumen.

The Experience

The learning curve would be steep. With an experienced KBA Nurse Executive Advisor as her dyad partner, the new CNO would quickly gain the knowledge and skills needed to lead in this complex healthcare environment.

The community medical center engaged KBA for Executive Advisory Solutions, focusing on three curriculum spheres within the Nurse Executive Gateway to Knowledge® program: Leadership Knowledge Development, Nursing Operations Management, and Essential Executive Relationships.

The KBA Nurse Executive Advisor and CNO spent invaluable time initially reviewing, analyzing, and prioritizing the CNO’s scope of responsibility, current state reports to include clinical, financial, recruitment/retention, quality & safety, and organization strategic imperatives. This step allowed for dyad clarification and alignment of priorities that provided a clear lens as to the developmental “lift” journey that they were on – together.

Over the course of the six-month engagement, the CNO obtained new knowledge and skills during on-site and virtual meetings with both the KBA Executive Advisor and by accessing the KBA digital online learning platform.

“A success strategy that I have developed since entering the program is framing discussions more thoughtfully to set myself up for meeting stakeholder expectations.”

-Chief Nursing Officer

- †† Developed and implemented an operational workbook to standardize reporting process by department.
 - Validated clinical and financial opportunities, aligned with best practice external indicators, and positively impacted retention, recruitment, and professional development across multiple clinical departments.
- †† Two years post program – CNO promoted to Senior Vice President, Chief Nursing Officer and obtained ANCC Nurse Executive, Advanced – Board Certified recognition.
- †† CNO remained with the organization, saved \$75,000 in cost of recruitment, and stabilized staff engagement, leadership engagement, productivity, recruitment, and retention.



GOAL: Emerge as a strong nurse executive with financial and professional business acumen.

- †† Advanced a proposal to standardize professional leadership development for the nursing leadership team (directors & managers) in which the CNO partnered with a Nurse Executive Advisor to advance the Nurse Executive Gateway to Knowledge® Leadership Team program.
- †† Re-recruited two nurse leaders who had considered transitioning out of the organization and saved a minimum of \$99,000 in recruitment costs.
- †† Avoided leadership vacancies and unplanned disruption of productivity and staff engagement by retaining essential leaders.

Additionally, the CNO evaluated the Nurse Executive Advisor at two points during the program, mid-way and at completion, based on the knowledge, value, and impact the advisor had in helping to narrow the CNO's nursing executive gaps and enhancing transferable knowledge. The CNO rated the Nurse Executive Advisor 5 (exceptional) out of 5 at mid-way and again 5 out of 5 upon program completion.

The KBA Nurse Executive Gateway to Knowledge® program provided an intentional leadership development pathway to guide and support this emerging Nurse Executive. The CNO advanced in the role and emerged with confidence and knowledge to optimally lead her team in alignment with organizational imperatives.



GOAL: Develop and operationalize an organizationally aligned and meaningful Professional Leadership Development Plan

- †† Developed and operationalized a Professional Leadership Development Plan to lead self and team fully aligned with organizational imperatives.
- †† Delivered a podium presentation focused on the CNO's role in advancing an intentional professional development program for nursing directors and managers at a regional nursing professional organization meeting.
- †† Created a Nursing Strategic Plan aligned with the organization's strategic initiatives.

As further evidence of the program's success and the CNO's growth into the role, the hospital president invited the new CNO to join the organization's Executive Cabinet.



Executive Advisory Solutions

