

American Sentinel University “Careers in Healthcare” Article Series (Part 8)

Becoming a Nurse Manager - Are the Benefits Worth the Costs?

By: Betty Nelson, PhD, RN

At some point in their careers, many nurses think about running a unit. As a staff member, they see how the unit functions from the front line: a unit that is well-run provides the conditions to deliver quality patient care. Providing the right management to deliver those conditions can be appealing.

But very few nurses actually make the decision to pursue a management role. There are many reasons why, with one being the costs.

If you are a nurse who is thinking about running a unit, this article will provide a framework to consider for becoming a manager. There are two categories of costs to consider: personal and financial.

Personal Costs

- **Identity shift** - Shifting away from direct patient care can be an assault on your identity. You are no longer a nurse providing direct patient care, but the manager of nurses and others. You are responsible for the quality of patient care delivered by others and for the efficiency of resource utilization.
- **A new peer group** – Your peer group changes to other nurse managers, which presents a challenge in how you gain support from your peers. As a nurse manager, there is no immediate access to real-time support. During the times you need help, your new peers may not be available.
- **Test of confidence** – Leaving a role for which you acquired expertise and are recognized for that expertise, to embrace a role for which you have no experience is the ultimate test of confidence. This shift should not be underestimated. Becoming a novice after being recognized as an expert can be disconcerting.
- **Time** – Investing time above and beyond a 40-hour week is required to learn a new role, especially in three main areas:
 - the specific line items in the job description
 - the network of people who are important to your ability to manage your unit
 - the acquisition of management skills and knowledge.

Financial Costs

Being an expert clinician does not guarantee that you will be a successful manager; for that, you need management education. Training can occur via:

- in-services and mentoring offered by your organization
- external continuing education and certificate programs
- academic degree programs.

Selecting the right education approach for you begins with an honest, comprehensive evaluation of your current management knowledge and skills and an assessment of the immediate and future education requirements for the role.*

After a self-evaluation, you can design a management development plan that will meet your education needs within your timeframe and budget. Employers may cover some or all of the expense of a program, but ultimately, managers will accrue costs to gain and maintain the required knowledge and skills.

Benefits

But there are also personal and financial benefits. The benefits often outweigh the costs for those who embrace wholeheartedly the art of management with the goal of maximizing patient care, staff satisfaction and organizational excellence.

The personal benefits can include:

- more control of your time
- more freedom to decide what to do and how to do it
- power to implement your ideas
- a larger impact on patient care and the lives of the front-line staff
- a great sense of personal achievement.

The financial benefit is obvious: managers make more money.

**The 2009 Magnet Appraisal Application Manual states that by 1/1/11, 75 percent of nurse managers must have at least a BSN; by 1/1/13, 100 percent must have a degree. The manual says that "...in the future, the Commission On Magnet will be moving towards requiring a graduate degree in nursing." (p. 6)*

I'd like to hear from you. What are your concerns about becoming a manager? Please share your questions or strategies with your fellow readers by sending them to me at healthcare@americansentinel.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

About the Author: *Betty Nelson, PhD, RN, a registered nurse with more than 30 years experience as a clinician, administrator and educator, is an adjunct professor in Health Sciences and Nursing at [American Sentinel University](http://www.americansentinel.edu).*

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of DETC is listed by the U.S. Department of Education as a nationally recognized accrediting agency and is a recognized member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.