

Headlines From the NLN

The Professional Identity in Nursing Initiative

Janice Brewington and Nelda Godfrey

During this International Year of the Nurse and Midwife, as we celebrate the 200th birthday of Florence Nightingale, the NLN is engaged with other nursing organizations in a new initiative known as the International Society for Professional Identity in Nursing. Professional identity is a core foundation of the nursing profession, exemplified by Nightingale as she provided care to soldiers during the Crimean War while also working to ensure that hospitals were sanitary with sufficient provisions. We define professional identity in nursing as “sense of oneself, and in relationship with others, that is influenced by characteristics, norms, and values of the nursing discipline, resulting in an individual thinking, acting and feeling like a nurse” (Godfrey & Young, 2020). Five attributes describe professional identity in nursing: Doing, Being, Acting Ethically, Flourishing, and Changing Identities (Godfrey & Young, 2020).

- **Doing:** Embraces society's rules and expectations as well as professional standards or codes...functioning within boundaries of prescribed roles at any given time [and] function[ing] within their scope of practice.
- **Being:** Making decisions from a framework of rightness...based on an individual's core values. This is an inherent quality...guided by an internal locus of control prompting individuals to behave appropriately in the context of situations.
- **Acting Ethically:** Operating from a foundation of values and making fair and just decisions personally and professionally without allowing biases to cloud interference while being aware that they exist...maintaining confidentiality with patient information.
- **Flourishing:** There is continuous positive personal and professional growth on a continuum. Individuals undergo a metamorphosis and transform to a higher level of maturation and well-being personally and within the profession.
- **Changing Identities:** As we progress through developmental stages in life, multiple identities emerge. It is important to understand how these identities may change and new behaviors accompany these changes. Understanding transition in...identities is important for growth and for professional identity to occur.

THINK TANK ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The conversation about professional identity in nursing began with two invitational Think Tanks with leaders from nursing education, practice, regulation, and health care, facilitated by Dr. Cynthia Clark

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and Dr. Susan Luparell. The purpose of the first meeting (September 2018 at the University of Kansas School of Nursing) was to explore the concept of professional identity in nursing. Through active engagement, the participants created four domains of professional identity and competencies for each domain (Clickner & Shirey, 2013).

- **Values and Ethics:** A set of core values and principles that guide conduct.
- **Knowledge:** Analysis and application of information derived from experiences, critical reflection, and scientific evidence.
- **Leadership:** Inspiring self and others to transform a shared vision into reality.
- **Professional comportment:** A nurse's professional behavior demonstrated through presence, words, and action.

The second Think Tank took place in September 2019. Outcomes included the development of a why statement: “To operationalize a clear understanding of nurses’ professional identity so that their unique contributions to improve healthcare are recognized” (Professional Identity in Nursing, 2019). This statement is critical to articulating the value proposition of the work evolving from the Think Tanks. The name, International Society for Professional Identity in Nursing, emerged from this meeting.

NEXT STEPS

The society is now engaged in implementing the following strategies:

- Establish a strategic planning committee.
- Establish three work groups: Dissemination, Demonstration Project, and Competencies
- Establish a research interest group and develop a conceptual model.
- Develop a psychometrically sound instrument to measure awareness of professional identity in nursing.
- Work with a social media specialist and disseminate information about the group's work through publications, research, and presentations.

The group will conduct a Professional Identity in Nursing Forum, September 9–10, 2020, at the University of Kansas Medical Center. Registration is limited to 75 (contact lrberts6@kumc.edu).

With the complexity of health care today and the prevalence of interprofessional education and practice, nurses must assume the leadership role to provide safe, quality care for patients and families. It becomes increasingly important for nurses to be clear about the meaning and value of professional identity in nursing. This is the framework from which nurses practice.

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