Using Theory to Organize Nursing Political Action Plans

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The realm of nursing is no longer limited to the patient’s bedside.

Nurses are finding themselves increasingly at the leadership table with a need to understand the political process and the accompanying mechanisms to implement changes.
Background (cont.)

Many changes in health care and nursing are accompanying the Affordable Care Act as well as other health issues within the U.S. and globally.

Nurses must become more politically aware and active to advance the profession of nursing and improve health care.
Background (cont.)

“This political awakening of nursing has included a recognition of the importance of health policy in nursing curricula” – both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Cohen et al. (1996)
Cohen’s Model

Describes the political development of the nursing profession which mirrors the same steps that individual nurses go through to learn the ropes of health policy & politics.

The model consists of four stages:
1. Stage One: Buy-In
2. Stage 2: Self-Interest
3. Stage 3: Political Sophistication
4. Stage 4: Leading the Way
Stage One: Buy-In

- This is a reactive stage, with a focus on nursing issues.
- Stage One occurs when the profession introduces nurses to the political awareness needed to address injustices and changes needed in the policy arena.
- This may be the “aha” moment for some.
- Action from Stage One: the nurse begins to decide how to become involved.
Stage Two: Self-Interest

- Stage Two occurs when the nurse becomes more focused on specific issues related to one’s area of practice, rather than the larger issues of nursing and health care.
- The nurse is motivated to learn the nuts & bolts of political activism and moves from recognition of a problem to developing a plan.
- Uses political skills to do this or volunteers to create a taskforce
Stage Three: Political Sophistication

- This is the time when the nurse realizes they are a health care expert.
- The nurse becomes active with policy-makers and health care leaders to be on their advisory committees, to testify before state legislators, and get appointed to policy-making bodies.
Stage Four: Leading the Way

- This is the highest stage of political involvement as this is when the nurse “sets the agenda” for change.
- Instead of just contributing knowledge, the nurse becomes the initiator of crucial policy development.
- The nurse directs the dialogue and policy development of organizations & institutions with a broader mission than health.
- Appointments to positions outside of nursing: university presidents, department head in state & federal government, state and federal legislators.
A nursing health policy and politics class was taught to 35 graduate nursing students.

An end of course assignment included projected political action plans at one and five-years; demographics were included.

This research study was IRB exempt as the results were associated with teaching effectiveness.
Assignment & Demographics

The assignment of one-year and five-year plans included the four spheres from Mason et al.’s conceptual framework that included:

1. Workplace
2. Government
3. Professional Organizations
4. Community

(Mason, Leavitt, & Chaffee, 2007).
The demographic questionnaire followed the characteristics of activist nurses who become involved (Gebbe, Wakefield, & Kerfoot, 2000):

1. Active parents, especially fathers.
2. Raised to be independent and believe in their capacity to accomplish what they want.
3. High school was a training ground for political socialization.
4. Nursing education provided role modeling & mentoring.
5. Clinical practice provided strong role models & opportunities for political insights.
6. Further nursing education opened the doors for further study.
7. Their consciousness was gradually raised through work experiences that exposed them to public policy & the need to understand how to influence the process.
Using a qualitative descriptive design, content analysis was done on the activities in the 1-year and 5-year plans using Cohen et al’s (1996) model of four stages of nursing’s political development.
Cohen et al.’s (1996) model served as the four-stage framework within which student responses were analyzed.

Analysis was done for each of the four spheres to which the students responded from Mason’s conceptual framework.
Content Analysis: One-Year Plan

Exemplars:
Stage One: Buy-In
“Want to continue to stay aware of the health issues that I learned in this class.”

Stage Two: Self Interest
“I want to become more active for stroke patients and their families.”
Exemplars:

Stage Three: Political Sophistication

“I want to write letters to my state & federal legislator again.”

Stage Four: Leading the Way

“I want to be elected to the town council where I live.”
Exemplars:

Stage One: Buy-In

“Continuation of staying aware of issues affecting nursing and the health of my patients, and playing a more active role.”

Stage Two: Self Interest

“I want to be on work committees that look at policies promoting family involvement.”
Content Analysis: Five-Year Plan (cont.)

Exemplars:
Stage Three: Political Sophistication

“I want to call and visit my state legislator and let them know I am available as a nurse expert to them.”

Stage Four: Leading the Way

“I want to be in Congress.”
Findings:

In the 1-year plan most activities were at the “Buy-In” to “Self-Interest” Stages,

Whereas, the 5-year plan indicated stages of “Increasing Political Sophistication” with a few students “Leading the Way.”
Findings (cont.)

According to the demographics -

Graduate nurses who were more politically active before the class, catapulted to higher levels.

While novice students in the political arena increased to one of the first two stages.
Implications for Nursing:

Cohen’s model was an effective means of determining the stage of development for the political activities projected by these graduate nursing students.

Again, echoing Cohen from 1996, curriculum content in nursing educational programs needs to include health policy and political action courses that can provide the tools that our future nurses need to effectively address nursing and health care issues in today’s world.
References


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Any Questions?
Hello!
from the School of Nursing
at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, U.S.A.
Interior design –
College of Health Sciences & Professions building in which the School of Nursing resides at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio