

## **Paper Session C3: Reflections on Clinical Practice**

### ***The Nurse Manager Narrative Project***

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The purpose of this project was to articulate the experientially acquired knowledge, skill and ethics embedded in nurse manager practice and describe the ways in which they were developed. Nurse managers are critical to assuring excellent patient care but little is known about how they acquire the skilled knowledge needed to develop nursing staff and nursing practice. Lists of competencies, talents and traits describing nurse managers fail to capture the experience-based judgment and skilled knowledge in this pivotal organizational role. Using Benner's methodology of practice articulation, fifty-nine nurse managers wrote and interpreted first person practice narratives to reflect on their lived experience in the role and give language to the skilled knowledge and ethical comportment embedded in their clinical leadership practice. This project revealed that interpretation of complex leadership challenges was a source of significant experiential learning for the individual and the group. For example, one narrative described how a new nurse manager struggled to work through the resistance of his staff to provide care to a critically ill patient and told of the experiential learning which ensued. Another manager described how her ability to see what was at stake in providing care to a dying neonate helped her to coach a frightened nurse through a high-stakes learning situation. Participants reported that their reflection on lived experience was more powerful in learning how to inhabit the role of nurse manager than striving to achieve predetermined role competencies or being evaluated by supervisors. The nurse manager peer group was described as a place to gain perspective and test strategies for problem-solving. Seeing how experiential learning affected the development of their own practice helped nurse managers learn to facilitate clinical knowledge development on their respective units. Research has shown that an individual's first managerial experience is crucial in shaping future executive practice. Therefore, reinforcing the primacy of clinical practice development in the face of what appear to be more pressing organizational demands will influence the next generation of nurse leaders.