It’s Your Career: Take Charge
Career Planning and Development
## IT'S YOUR CAREER: TAKE CHARGE CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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for the International Council of Nurses

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INTRODUCTION

Health care in the world is changing and the world of health care is changing, creating new roles, new work settings and new colleagues for nurses. Changes in nursing and in the health care system have also created environments in which nurses must become career resilient and self-directed. Nurses must take control of their careers and futures in their quest for self-determination as professionals. Career-resilience is about flexibility and adaptability, something nurses understand. Career-resilience conforms to the many definitions of nursing professional practice that include autonomy, self-direction, and continuous learning.

Nurses require support in their practice and in their professional development, now more than ever. Career planning and development is an integral part of developing as a professional wherever one lives and works. Nurses have dreams, goals, and ideas about their futures. They need a process to guide them in achieving their maximum potential. How can I plan my career? How can I remain employable? What are the opportunities today and what will they be in the future? and, Who can help me? are the current questions. Nurses must integrate the process of career planning and development into their ongoing professional and personal development.

Purpose

*It’s Your Career: Take Charge*, is directed towards individual nurses to help them take charge and be in control of their careers within the ever-changing world of health care. This is a training package that provides nurses with:

- An overview of what career planning and development is and why it is important.
- A five-phase career planning and development model and activities to guide career development.
- A trainer guide for those who want to conduct an It’s Your Career: Take Charge workshop and offer career coaching.

These guidelines highlight the key dimensions of career planning and development and offer guidance to those who wish to evaluate the present and shape their future.
What is Career Planning?

Career planning is “a continuous process of self-assessment and goal setting”\(^1\). It helps nurses adapt to change in their own development, in the profession and in the environment in which they live and practice. Careers need attention and nurturing. They are, “life expressions of how a person wants to be-in-the-world”\(^2\). As people move through their careers, their skills develop, their needs change, and their goals and plans evolve. Nurses’ careers generally can be described as passing through five stages:

- **Learning**, which takes place within the basic educational programme and in additional learning, e.g. with specialisation.
- **Entry**, when newly graduated nurses select their first employment in nursing.
- **Commitment**, when nurses identify their likes and dislikes in terms of clinical area, geography, work life etc.
- **Consolidation**, when nurses become comfortable with their chosen career path and with their relationship between the personal and the professional.
- **Withdrawal**, when nurses prepare for retirement.\(^3\)

These stages reflect movement through a career, not merely movement through jobs. In each stage, one may have more than one job or position. Career planning can play a crucial role at every stage of a nurse’s career. It is something that students, beginning practitioners, and experienced professionals can use to enrich their current role or to assist them in changing roles. As nurses review their professional goals, training needs and job opportunities throughout their careers, they may pass through most of the stages more than once.

Why Career Planning and Development is Important

The tremendous changes that have marked nursing over the last half of the 20th century have brought significant challenges and opportunity. Cycles of boom and bust, high unemployment and shortages of workers have been common. Change has been the norm. These changes have created an environment in which individuals must take control of their careers. Nurses can no longer depend on others to define their future for them. Continuous career planning is a strategy that can offer the means to respond to short and long-term changes in the profession, in health care, and in the workplace, whether that be a large institution, community agency or a small business.

The career planning and development process helps nurses answer the following four questions:

- Where have I been?
- Where am I now?
- Where would I like to go?
- How will I get there?
The process is really the development of a life skill, one that nurses can apply in their workplaces, and in their personal life. It is an individual responsibility, a life long activity, and a necessary skill in a changing world of work and health care. When one engages in the process, a sense of enjoyment, pride, and energy is also realised.

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THE CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Career development is a repetitive and continuous rather than a linear process. It requires individuals to understand their work and life environment, assess their strengths and limitations, validate that assessment, articulate their personal career vision, develop a realistic plan for the future, and then market themselves to achieve career goals.

The five phases of the career planning and development model are:

- Scanning your environment.
- Completing your self-assessment and reality.
- Creating your career vision.
- Developing your strategic career plan.
- Marketing yourself.

Scanning Your Environment

Scanning your environment is taking stock of the world in which you live. It involves understanding current realities in the health care system and the work environment as well as the future trends at the global, national, and local levels in society, health care, and nursing. Through the scanning process you become better informed, learn to see the world through differing perspectives, and are able to identify career opportunities, both current and future.

When asked to think about the word “environment”, you should imagine both a close-up picture of the health care setting, and a wide-angle shot of the external area surrounding you. To understand how current trends and future developments in health care might affect your career, you must also think about the broader environmental context as well.
We observe, learn about, and assess the world around us through reading, talking with others, and continuing our education. Through exposing ourselves not only to nursing and health care information and ideas, but also from other disciplines and ideologies, we broaden our understanding of daily realities.

You must have a solid understanding of the environment before you can decide how to use your skills and experience in the most beneficial way, for you and for society. Scanning is the easiest and most productive way to place yourself as an observer, rather than a player. You can see beyond your immediate circumstances to grasp what is possible, to think about things in new ways, and to open yourself to opportunities.

The process of scanning is generic, although the specifics of the scan will vary. There are cultural, political, and social differences among countries, and it is through attention to those characteristics that a scan is completed.

Throughout our careers, each of us must scan continuously, and in a variety of ways. Sources of information for the scan include professional and popular journals, news media, the Internet, observations, friends and colleagues, and everyday experiences. Reading, talking, and listening, all part of the repertoire of nursing skills, are the means to make sense of the information we collect. Once collected, the information must be organised into global, national, and local categories.

Think of the scan as a work in progress, something to be continuously updated to reflect the changing environment. Scanning is not a task to be completed at some regular, or irregular time, but rather an integral part of everyday professional and personal life, identifying the global, national, and local trends and issues in society, health care, and nursing. Here are some questions to help you complete an environmental scan:

- What health/social issues seem to be worldwide phenomena?
- What are the nursing issues that seem to be global in their scope?
- What are the health and social trends in your country?
- What are the issues affecting nurses in your country?
- What are some of the important social and health issues in your local area?
- What are the important nursing issues in your local area?
- Where are the gaps between patient/consumer needs and services provided?

**Completing Your Self-Assessment and Reality Check**

Completing your self-assessment and reality check enables you to identify values, experiences, knowledge, strengths, and limitations. These should be linked those with your environmental scan to help create your career vision and identify the directions for your future. As you begin self-assessment, you will focus on yourself and so that you can recognise, your attributes, what you have to offer. Completing your self-assessment and reality check will allow you to give honest, accurate answers to the two questions, “Who am I?” and “How do others see me?”

To complete a self-assessment you need to allow time and concentration to look inward, take stock, and to develop a personal and professional profile. A self-assessment requires considerable reflection, the ability to ask yourself some hard questions, and the determination to validate your responses with others. Once completed, your self-assessment will allow you to promote your skills and talents and to understand where to improve or add to your skills. With an accurate picture of yourself, you can investigate the full spectrum of available and potential opportunities and decide which options are right for you.
“Who Am I?”
How would you describe yourself? Answering this question involves much more than describing what you do or what your job title is. Work is just one part of our lives, though many people describe themselves only in relation to the work they do. As you move through your self-assessment, keep the whole you in mind. Remember that you are a complex human being, the sum of past and current experiences.

Who we are includes our beliefs, values, knowledge and skills, and our interests. Beliefs are the way we view ourselves and the world around us. Values are the principles or standards that drive our decisions, actions, behaviours, and relations. They are the ideals that guide and give meaning to our lives and work. Knowledge and skills are the abilities and behaviours we use to produce results, and interests are the activities in which we like to spend most of our time and from which we gain pleasure. Consider the following questions:

**Values:**
- What is important to me in my work and in my personal life?
- Who or what do I need to consider in my life at this time?
- What are my priorities—self, family, community or other?
- What knowledge and skills have I developed, personally and professionally?
- What are my strengths?
- What are my limitations?
- What knowledge and skills require further development?

**Interests:**
- What have you liked about your past and current job(s)?
- What haven’t you liked?
- What kind of environment brings out the best in you?
- What do you like to do outside of the workplace?
- What energises or motivates you?

As you finish your self-assessment, you should be able to identify your strengths, limitations and significant accomplishments. Accomplishments are the highlights of your performance in your role. They reflect those times in which you achieved a personal or professional best. The following questions will help you.

- In the past 3 to 5 years, what have been your most significant accomplishments at work and outside of work?
- Can you describe those times in your personal or professional life where you made a difference?

Once you have completed your self-assessment and answered the question “Who Am I?” you must validate it by doing a reality check.

“How do others see me?” is the complementary and critical second question you must ask yourself. A reality check is accomplished by seeking feedback regarding your strengths and limitations from people with whom you live and work. It expands your view of yourself by reflection on others’ perspectives. A reality check is essential to deepening your level of self-awareness and facilitating your growth. To complete your reality check ask yourself the following questions:

- What feedback have I received about my achievements from colleagues, friends, and family?
- What did they identify as my strengths and limitations?
- What three adjectives would they use to describe me, both in and outside my workplace and why?
- How did my assessment of accomplishments compare with others’ assessments?
Creating Your Career Vision

Once you determine a realistic and comprehensive picture of your own values, beliefs, knowledge, and skills, and have looked at those in the context of the real world scan you have completed, you are ready to think about your career possibilities. Because the vision of your potential future is grounded in your scan and self-assessment, it is focused on what is possible and realistic for you, both in the short and the longer term. Your career vision is the link between who you are and what you can become.

Having a career vision is perhaps the most forceful motivator for reaffirming our current situation or for making a change. Creating a career vision answers the question, “What do I want?” If you do not have some idea of where you want to go, you will most likely simply react to events as they occur rather than choose a direction in which to go and be able to anticipate or take advantage of an opportunity when it occurs.

Many nurses have never considered that they could have a part to play in designing their career futures. Some may have to free themselves from a career path that others have expected of them before they can begin to formulate their own career vision. Others will see that they have more choices than they had ever considered. These changes require a shift in orientation. You must move from being the observer about what others think you should be doing with your career to becoming an active participant in the picture, a goal setter, a doer.

Wouldn’t it be great to design your work the way you want it? You may be able to do that, but first you need to create a vision for your work. It may be a more comprehensive version of what you are already doing, or it may be very different. There are two general questions that will guide you in this process. “Where would I like to go?” functions like a warm-up or brainstorming session. Open thinking is at work here; no answer is wrong. “What is my ideal vision for my work?” provides more focus as you begin to create your new or updated career vision.

As you moved through this process, you may come to the point where you say to yourself, “I want to (fill in your own response), but I can’t because I’m too old, or I don’t know how to go about applying for the position, or I’m not good enough.” Many nurses do not believe that they can do what they really want to do in their careers. Self-limiting beliefs block us and our progress. Although the environment can impose barriers to our progress, what we believe about ourselves and what could be possible are powerful determinants of our behaviour.

When you start, your vision doesn’t have to be too realistic; that comes later in the process when you set your career goals. Don’t worry about your vision being too big, too vague, or seemingly impossible. It should be grand, inspiring, and if it is an important dream, it may be a little scary. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I want? What am I seeking?
- What does my ideal day look like? What am I doing, where am I doing it, and who is there with me?
- Is someone currently doing the kind of work I’d like to do? Describe the characteristics of that work.
- What are the self-limiting beliefs that could prevent me from doing what I really want to do?
- What are the environmental constraints that I must consider before I can do what I really want to do?
DEVELOPING YOUR STRATEGIC CAREER PLAN

A strategic career plan is a blueprint for action. It specifically identifies the goals, activities, timelines, and resources you need to help you achieve your career vision. This is the part of the process where you start to put on paper the specific strategies you will use to take charge of your future. Of course, this is also where the spiral or repetitive nature of the process is reinforced. The strategic career plan is always a “work in progress”, continuously being evaluated and revised.

Developing a strategic career plan is critical to taking control of your own career. Designing it is not something that someone else can do for you. You must do it for yourself to ensure that you are continually and satisfactorily progressing towards your personal career goals. The object is to ensure that you have a plan that is both uniquely yours and easily converted into action. It must be derived from your career vision and should outline specific actions that you can take to achieve clearly defined goals.

The motivation to develop a plan comes from being genuinely interested in a career rather than being solely concerned with having regular employment. A career is a lifelong investment and, as with any investment, planning pays off.

Document your plan—in writing. The exercise of “writing it down” forces you to include each of the critical components and makes it easier for you to continually review, refine, evaluate and re-evaluate both your goals and your progress. A strategic career plan includes the identification of goals, action steps, resources, timelines, and indicators of success.

Set Goals A goal is the objective for an endeavour. It keeps you looking towards the future, focused on finish-
MARKETING YOURSELF

Regardless of whether you have chosen a nursing role as an employee or have decided to embark on self-employment, you will need to acquire self-marketing skills. This involves the ability to package your professional and personal qualities, attributes and expertise so that you can effectively communicate, either to your employer or client, what you have to offer and why you are the best person for the service that needs to be delivered.

Self-marketing is facilitated by establishing a network, acquiring a mentor, and developing written and verbal communication skills. Thus, self-marketing entails scanning the environment and “knowing your business.” Having the ability to articulate who you are, what you want, and what you can do represents only half the equation. The other half is the ability to persuade others that what you have to offer meets the demands and challenges of the ever-changing environment. Your strengths, coupled with a commitment and belief in yourself, make you your own best marketer.

Networking. Establishing a network is fundamental to marketing yourself. The process of networking involves the development of mutually beneficial relationships through the exchange of personal and written resources. Effective networking enables you to establish your presence, to create widespread visibility and exposure, and to make others aware of your skills, talents, and accomplishments. Keep in mind that what is most important is who knows you. When you meet people, concentrate on who you are and what you can do for them.

Networking is key to keeping “in the know” about what is going on in nursing and health care. This allows you to position yourself strategically and maintain professional visibility. Once you have established your network(s) you can target certain individuals and begin to build and maintain a support group. Support groups are based on the principle that few people have ever accomplished their objectives solely on their own. Your support group should consist of individuals who believe in you and want to see you succeed.

Finding a mentor. The second step in a self-marketing strategy should be to acquire a mentor. It is especially important to have a mentor to guide you as you plan to transform your dreams into reality. In the nursing world, mentors generally are experienced nurses who understand the health care environment, have good connections, and have more access to information than less experienced, often younger, nurses. These experienced nurses, who already have made a significant contribution to nursing, are often interested in sharing their knowledge and fostering leadership skills in less experienced nurses. But do not restrict yourself to the nursing community to find a mentor. Your social, community, and business connections are also excellent resources.

Developing Your Communication Skills: Marketing Yourself on Paper. Creating a targeted resume and other written communication, for example, business cards, is an important part of self-marketing. A well-constructed resume is your best-written promotional piece. Like you, it is unique. An effective resume will represent your knowledge, skills and talents in such a convincing way that the reader can get an immediate sense of who you are and what you can do for them.

Writing for publication is another way in which you can use communication skills to market yourself. There are numerous opportunities to highlight your knowledge and potential to diverse audiences. Community newspapers, professional journals and health care information pamphlets are but a few of the vehicles you can use to let others know what you can do. Review your environmental scan, your self-assessment and your plan to help you begin to think about the written self-marketing opportunities you can create.
Developing Your Communication Skills: Marketing Yourself in Person. Developing your presentation skills through professional speaking, presentation and interviewing are the next steps in the self-marketing process. Each time you meet someone new or have the chance to speak to a group, you are presented with a marketing opportunity to accent your positives, take credit for your accomplishments, and remind others of what you have to contribute.

The interview is another excellent self-marketing opportunity that you will have many occasions to use over the course of your career. Interviewing is a powerful self-marketing tool in which you can ensure that you have presented yourself in the most positive and appropriate manner.

Developing A Business Image. Marketing is a significant component of business survival for self-employed nurses and for those who are employees. For nurses who are employees, the business image is one mean to keep your employer and colleagues aware of your contribution to the workplace and of your interest in its future goals and plans. For the self-employed nurse, a business image includes making and maintaining contact with potential markets. Be aware that a positive image is built gradually. However, a negative image develops quickly and is very difficult to reverse.

Regardless of whether you are employed or self-employed, self-marketing entails using all your resources to present yourself in the strongest, most positive way. Remember, you are your own foremost resource in shaping your future. Keep your goal in mind. Creating an effective self-marketing strategy takes time, effort and patience. Following these strategies will help you realise your goals. Consider the following questions:

- How is your marketing readiness?
- Which areas need some attention?
- Have you developed a plan to address those needs?

Conclusion

A career is personal and individual. It is about an individual’s values, choices, goals, and plans. Career planning and development must be an integral part of nurses’ professional development. It must be situated within their lives and careers, and not an occasional act. It’s Your Career: Take Charge provides nurses with information and activities that they can use to enthusiastically shape their careers and futures.
REFERENCES


