



## **Nursing Education: The Importance of Being a Charge Nurse**

A charge nurse plays a pivotal role in overseeing the nursing staff and ensuring smooth operations within their assigned set. They act as the point of contact for nursing staff (including care partners), physicians, and administration. Beyond their direct care duties, charge nurses are responsible for directing staff, managing routines, and ensuring processes are running efficiently.

### **Responsibilities of a Charge Nurse:**

- **Planning and Coordination:** The charge nurse plans procedures and resident care tasks for the shift. At the start of the shift, they distribute the workload efficiently, considering each individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities. The charge nurse also evaluates resident outcomes throughout the shift.
- **Set Huddle:** It's helpful to start the shift by gathering the team together. Call the MSC, care partners, and UCPs to the nurse's station for a "set huddle." Discuss fall risks, major changes in condition, residents requiring frequent checks, residents refusing care, and those needing extra support. Ensure clear communication of concerns and expectations—your shift, your team, your responsibility.

The role of the charge nurse demands patience, attention to detail, and skill. The following seven traits are vital for success in this role, allowing charge nurses to coordinate work and resources, meet dynamic needs, and ensure positive resident outcomes.

### **Key Traits of a Successful Charge Nurse**

1. **Delegation:** A charge nurse must understand the abilities and skills of their team members to delegate tasks appropriately. The American Nurses Association identifies the Five Rights of Delegation:
  - **Right Task:** Does the task align with the person's role and skill set?
  - **Right Circumstance:** Is the resident stable enough to handle the task?
  - **Right Person:** Is the individual with the right knowledge and skills delegated for the task?
  - **Right Directions:** Has the charge nurse communicated the task clearly?
  - **Right Supervision and Evaluation:** Is the delegated task monitored and evaluated?

If a resident requires specific monitoring, it's acceptable for the charge nurse to delegate tasks to the most suitable care partner, but this should be done thoughtfully and, on a case,-by-case basis.

2. **Leadership:** Leadership involves a combination of unique qualities, including integrity, self-awareness, adaptability, empathy, and respect. A charge nurse leads by inspiring the team toward a shared goal of excellent care. They also encourage professional growth and development. Leading by example fosters respect and strengthens positive relationships within the team. If team members are struggling with a task, it's important for the charge nurse to step in, teach, and lead them toward improvement.
3. **Flexibility:** A nurse's workday is unpredictable—admissions, discharges, and urgent care needs can quickly shift priorities. A good charge nurse must be flexible in reallocating resources as the resident population evolves. They must handle obstacles calmly and make decisions confidently, even under pressure. It's essential to maintain composure and professionalism, even when unexpected situations arise.
4. **Self-confidence:** Charge nurses must have the confidence to make decisions, motivate others, and communicate effectively. Confidence allows charge nurses to lead effectively, learn new skills, and grow in their leadership role.
5. **Critical Thinking:** Critical thinking is essential in evaluating situations and making decisions, especially when resident care needs change unexpectedly. For instance, if a resident's behavior changes suddenly, a charge nurse must quickly assess whether it's due to medication, infection, or other health factors, making quick decisions to protect resident well-being.
6. **Organization:** A charge nurse must be highly organized to ensure smooth operations. With fluctuating demands, relying solely on clinical skills can lead to chaos. Charge nurses should prioritize essential tasks, manage resources efficiently, and address staffing challenges. An organized environment contributes to better resident care and overall facility function.

**Note:** Maintain cleanliness and order in shared spaces like the nurse's station and supply closets. These areas should remain organized for the benefit of all staff.

7. **Humility:** Humility fosters respect and engagement with the team. A humble charge nurse is approachable and willing to collaborate with other team members, sharing strengths without seeking recognition. Emotional intelligence and interpersonal awareness help the charge nurse manage different personalities and contribute to positive working relationships.

### **Additional Responsibilities of a Charge Nurse:**

- **Prepare for the Next Nurse:** As a charge nurse, you should always be looking out for the nurse coming on the next shift. Ensure that all medications are stocked and reordered as necessary. Check that all supplies on the med cart are fully stocked and wipe down the cart for cleanliness. It's important to ensure the water pitcher is full for the next shift, and that loose medications are not left in the med cart. Properly organize the cart for a smooth transition. Ensure the trash is emptied.
- **Comprehensive Report:** When handing off to the next nurse, make sure you pass on all the critical information. A thorough report ensures that the incoming nurse has the details they need for safe and effective care.

## Lead by Example:

Charge nurses must **lead by example**. They set the standard for professionalism, work ethic, and resident care, demonstrating the behaviors they expect from their team. When charge nurses actively embody these qualities, they inspire their teams to uphold high standards of care, ensuring positive outcomes for residents.

**The Best Director of Nursing I Ever Knew Always Said:** *"Your shift will run how you want it to run and how you allow it to run. Set your standards and set them high."*

This wisdom highlights the importance of leadership and sets clear expectations for both the team and you. Charge nurses must create an environment where high standards are expected and upheld to ensure the best care for residents and a supportive atmosphere for the team.

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## Colonial Heights Nursing Home Arrests: 18 Employees Charged in Resident Death

In a tragic case at Colonial Heights Rehabilitation and Nursing Center, 18 employees, including several nurses, were charged in connection with the death of a 74-year-old resident. The charges include felony abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults, falsifying patient records, and obstruction of justice.

### Key Details of the Case:

- **Victim:** A 74-year-old woman with cerebral palsy and diabetes.
- **Allegations:**
  - The resident was reportedly left in her bed for days without being turned or cleaned, causing severe wounds and contributing to sepsis that led to her death.
  - Her foot was allegedly broken, and she was administered incorrect medication, which is said to have poisoned her.
- **Charges:**
  - 7 counts of felony abuse and neglect
  - 2 counts of misdemeanor abuse and neglect
  - 2 counts of obstruction
  - 27 counts of falsifying patient records

### Arrests and Charges:

- Notable individuals charged include:
  - Shawonda Jeter (46), Administrator
  - Danielle Harris (53), Nurse Trainer
  - Kamesha Kittrell, Director of Nursing
  - Shakima Brewer, Night Nurse

### Implications for Nursing Leadership:

Two individuals, Kamesha Kittrell and Shakima Brewer, have faced intense scrutiny due to their roles in the incident. Kittrell is accused of falsifying records and ensuring unqualified staff signed off on training. Brewer is accused of falsifying records related to the resident's wounds.

This case underscores the critical role of nursing leadership in ensuring quality care, adherence to protocols, and accurate documentation. The failure to uphold these standards led to tragic consequences for the resident and resulted in criminal charges against the staff involved.

### **Broader Implications for Elder Care:**

This case highlights the importance of accountability in nursing homes and long-term care facilities. The Virginia Attorney General's Elder Abuse Investigation Center is actively working to address concerns about elder abuse and improve care practices. It serves as a reminder of the responsibilities healthcare professionals have in providing safe, compassionate care, and the devastating effects when these responsibilities are neglected.

The outcome of this case may influence future nursing home policies, staff training, and regulatory oversight, emphasizing the need for vigilance, transparency, and adherence to high standards in elder care.