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Career Ladder Professionalism in Nursing: A Concept Analysis

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Abstract
A defined career path for nurses is essential, as they constitute the largest segment of healthcare workers and hold strategic and leadership roles in determining the quality of patient care and overall hospital quality. This study aims to analyze the concept of professionalism in relation to the implementation of career paths for nurses within hospital settings. This concept analysis follows the steps outlined by Walker & Avant. A literature search was conducted using the PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest databases to identify articles published between 2014 and 2024. After filtering, 9 articles were selected from various scientific disciplines such as nursing, medicine, education, and other health-related fields. This study identified three main attributes related to the clinical professional ladder: 1) integrity, 2) justice, and 3) beneficence. Antecedents include education, workshops/conferences, experience, and professional identity. Consequences include ethics, patient outcomes, nursing outcomes, future career opportunities, job satisfaction, retention, salary, and organizational commitment. This concept analysis enhances our understanding of the three attributes of the career ladder and professionalism (CLp) and provides insights into future development and uncertainties in nursing management. This concept is highly valuable for nurse management settings, particularly in enhancing professionalism through career path programs. Ultimately, this concept analysis approach encourages both new and experienced nurses to maintain professionalism in the delivery of nursing care.

Keywords: Career Ladder Professional, Nursing, Concept Analysis.

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1.   **INTRODUCTION**

Nurses are providers of professional nursing services (Blais & Hayes, 2015). Professionalism in nursing encompasses values and ethics, including altruism, autonomy, dignity, integrity, honesty, and justice (Karami et al., 2017; Poorchangizi et al., 2019; van der Wath & van Wyk, 2020). The integration and implementation of these professional values are crucial to ensuring the future of nursing as the frontline of patient care in hospitals (Karami et al., 2017). Thus, nursing is not merely a profession but also prioritizes compassion and empathy in the delivery of nursing care (Yi et al., 2022).

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the importance of strengthening nursing professionalism and requires countries to report on their efforts (WHO, 2016), Professionalism in nurses is cultivated during their education. A study by Gilvari at Semnan University, involving 196 nursing students, found that a high A Grade point Average (GPA) and practical experience are key factors in shaping nurse professionalism (Gilvari et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2022). This underscores the vital role of educators in fostering student professionalism (Tang et al., 2022).

Professionalism continues to develop as nurses enter the workforce, becoming ingrained as a social response (Su et al., 2021) New nurses require learning opportunities and recognition, which can be achieved through a structured career path that includes continuing professional development (Kim et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Pertiwi et al., 2021; Rahmah et al., 2021). A career path serves as an assessment system to evaluate skills, competencies, and experience in nursing practice (Ahn & Choi, 2023) Career paths facilitate the mapping of nurses according to their competencies (Sandehang et al., 2019), and support career advancement, rewards, duty awareness, and skills development (Pertiwi & Hariyati, 2019). Thus, the career ladder and professionalism (CLp) are intrinsically linked and inseparable. Study aim is reviewing career ladder and professionalism through concept analysis is essential to promote clarity while providing mutual understanding within nursing.

2.   **RESEARCH METHOD**

This concept analysis was conducted using the Walker and Avant method to interpret dimensions, attributes, antecedents, consequences, cases, and empirical references (Walker & Avan, 2019). This approach involves selecting a concept, determining the objectives of the analysis, identifying all uses of the concept, determining the defining characteristics of the concept, creating a model case, developing borderline, conflicting, and imaginary cases, identifying the antecedents and consequences of the concept, and determining empirical references for the concept. A literature search was conducted online by reviewing articles closely related to career paths and professional nursing. The databases used were PubMed, Scopus, and ProQuest. The keywords used were "Career path," "career ladder," "nursing," "nurse," and "professional." The search included articles published in the last 10 years and written in English.

3.   **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

According to Walker and Avan (2019), the best concept is one that aligns with our interests and is significant for advancing the field. The selection of this concept aims to provide clarity that will help nurses become more professional and enhance the quality of practice in hospitals. The chosen concept is the career ladder and professionalism. According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, professionalism refers to the high standards expected of someone trained in a particular job (University of Oxford, 2024).

The second step in this concept analysis is determining the purpose of the concept (Walker & Avant, 2019). This concept aims to assist in focusing analytical attention on how professionalism is closely related to the implementation of career paths for nurses within hospital settings.

The process of identifying attributes starts with a literature search. For this concept analysis, several databases were used, including PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest. The search included articles published in the last 10 years and written in English. The literature was not limited to nursing but included other disciplines such as psychology, economics, medicine, and other scientific fields (Walker & Avant, 2019). A total of 9 articles were found and analyzed: six from nursing, one from education, one from medicine, and one from the broader health field. The keywords and search process are detailed in Table 1.

Determining the Defining Attributes. Walker and Avant stated that attributes are identified based on the largest clusters to provide broader insight (Walker & Avant, 2019). The authors found 10 articles related to professionalism, highlighting attributes such as integrity, justice, beneficence, and respect (Table 2).

Integrity originates from the Latin words "integritas" and "atis," meaning the condition of being truthful and not manipulated, and is synonymous with honor (Stigger et al., 2022) This attribute pertains to nurses genuinely serving patients, providing accurate diagnoses, and conducting intervention processes to the best of their abilities. Integrity forms the framework and basic foundation of nursing science, encompassing personal values, moral, and professional ethics (Seidlein & Kuhn, 2023).

Justice refers to the fair and impartial treatment of all patients, ensuring equitable decision-making in reporting and implementation (Correia & Almeida, 2020; Haghighinezhad et al., 2019; Hashish, 2020) Justice should be upheld not only by nurses but also by organizations, patient families, and coworkers (Correia & Almeida, 2020). Nursing has a long history of advocating for social justice, focusing on addressing the social root causes of poor health, as well as ensuring patient safety and fairness (Ibrahim, 2024; Rudner, 2021) There is a consensus on the need to include social justice issues in nursing education to empower nurses to address health disparities (Abu & Moorley, 2023).

Beneficence is defined as the practice of doing good and helping patients (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019) Fundamentally, beneficence aims to protect patients' rights, prevent harm, and provide care for those at risk (Cummings & Mercurio, 2010).

Table 1. Career Ladder and Professionalism (CLp) Concept definitions

Authors (Years)	Fields	Definition
(Kim et al., 2017)	Nursing	Human resource management system to manage nurses by building nursing knowledge and management.
(Li et al., 2022)	Nursing	A level of clinical practice that recognizes and values nurses' contributions to quality, evidence-based care that positively influences patient care.
(Vilendrer et al., 2022)	Medicine	Process to reduce job burnout, turnover, skepticism, and obtain additional education.
(Coleman & Desai, 2019)	Nursing	A structured system to advance nurses' careers while remaining in a clinical environment by placing nurses based on their professional skills.
(Xenakis, 2018)	Health	The advancement process encourages workers to engage in critical reflective thinking, summarize their work carefully, and relate their practice to theoretical foundations.
(Ghamrawi & Abu-Tineh, 2023)	Education	Structures frequently used to support the development and alignment of teacher recruitment, pre-service and in-service training,

		assessment procedures, and career advancement opportunities.
(Pertiwi & Hariyati, 2019)	Nursing	Programs that influence nurse satisfaction and turnover rates
(Filani et al., 2019)	Nursing	Used to differentiate the implementation of nursing practice at each level to facilitate professional development, improve staff relationships, appreciation, and competence, and increase work motivation.
(Slagle et al., 2023)	Nursing	The program promotes best clinical practices, professional development, increased satisfaction, recognition of expertise, and efforts to reduce retention.

Concept definition is an explanation and definition of concepts from various fields of science, these definitions are then described according to table 1 and between one definition and another, similarities are sought so that they can be grouped.

Table 2. Attributes of Career Ladder and Professionalism (CLp)

Keyword clusters	Sources	Attributes
- It is the state or characteristic of being full and complete - Ethics - Personal morality - Sense of personal, professional, and social wholeness - Maintain dignity as human beings - Be recognized as individuals	(Stigger et al., 2022)	Integrity
- Does not differentiate - Balanced decision - Fair regarding implementation - Not racist	(Chandler et al., 2022; Correia & Almeida, 2020; Haghighinezhad et al., 2019; Hashish, 2020)	Justice
- Beneficial - Help - Mercy - Protect patient rights - Prevent loss - Help those at risk - Generosity	(Beauchamp & Childress, 2019; Cheraghi et al., 2023; Cummings & Mercurio, 2010; Ivanov & Oden, 2013)	Beneficence

Cases
Model Case

This case involves Nurse Maria, who has 10 years of work experience and is confident in all her activities in providing nursing care to her patients. Nurse Maria is committed to providing the best service in accordance with nursing professional standards. Her patients often praise her, and it is not uncommon for patients and their families to respect her for her integrity, sense of fairness, and selfless assistance to patients and their families.

Borderline Case

This case involves Nurse Ani, who works in the emergency room of a private hospital. On Mondays, she is on night duty from 20:00 to 08:00 the next day. During her shift at around 22:00, Patient B is admitted to the ER with complaints of chest pain and difficulty breathing. Patient B happens to be a close family member who lives next door to her. However, 5 minutes later, another patient is admitted to the ER due to a traffic accident and is unconscious. Nurse Ani, without hesitation, leaves Patient B, her family member, to immediately treat the traffic accident patient. Nurse Ani acts fairly in this situation by prioritizing the patient in greater need, even though her family member also requires treatment.

Contrary Case

This case involves Nurse Ani, who works as the head of the emergency unit in a hospital. During working hours, the ER is full of patients with various complaints. Despite the busy environment, Nurse Ani is not assisting in treating patients but is seen playing with her cell phone. Occasionally, she greets patients she knows and instructs her subordinate nurses to prioritize these familiar patients.
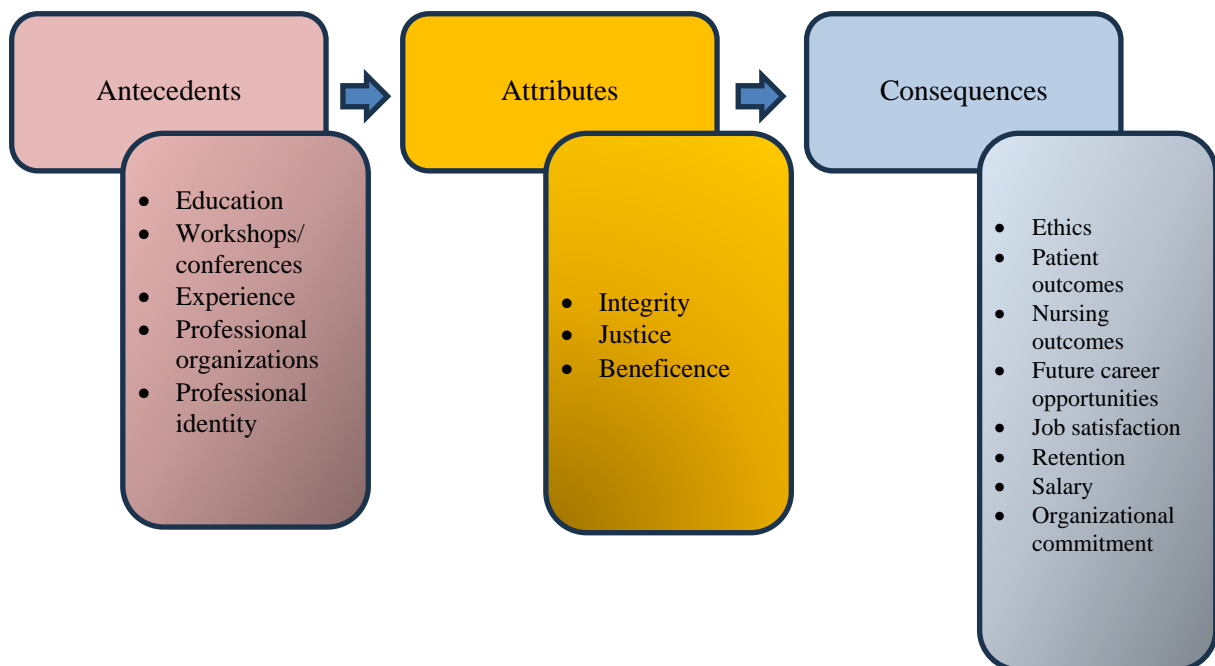

Figure 1. Antecedents, Attributes, and Consequences

Antecedents are events preceding the concept that contribute to refining its attributes (Walker & Avant, 2019). The career ladder and professionalism is shaped by the nurse's personal values manifested through education, training, and certification. The following antecedents have been identified for the professional nursing career ladder:
a. Education
b. Workshop or conferences
c. Experience
d. Professional organizations
e. Professional identity

Based on the framework outlined by Walker and Avant (2019), consequences arise as a result of a concept. When discussing the consequences of a career ladder and professionalism, it is essential to consider the role of ethics and formal standards. The following consequences have been identified for the professional nursing career ladder:

a. Ethics
b. Patient outcomes
c. Nursing outcomes
d. Future career opportunities/success
e. Job satisfaction
f. Retention
g. Salary
h. Organizational commitment

Empirical references are phenomena observed directly and are directly connected with the attributes defining the concept, or in other words, they provide opportunities to measure the career ladder and professionalism (Walker & Avant, 2019). The career ladder and professionalism can be assessed using screening tools such as the Nursing Professionalism Evaluation Model in a Career Ladder System (NPEM-CLs) (Kim et al., 2017) and the Career Growth Scale for Nurses (CGSN) (Ni et al., 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

This concept analysis has identified three critical attributes in the career ladder and professionalism: integrity, justice, and beneficence. The insights gained from this conceptual analysis can inform the development of career path programs for nurses. Additionally, these findings emphasize the importance for nurses to actively engage in and adhere to career path initiatives within hospital settings.

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