Developing Your Skills as an Effective Ward Manager

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Report by Martin Calise, BACCN Member, Quality Improvement Lead and Charge Nurse in Critical Care at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

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I am grateful for the opportunity to have attended this virtual conference, which provided the time to learn and reflect on the evolving nature of clinical leadership. The event was very well-structured and featured expert speakers from around the UK to share insights into the responsibilities, challenges and developmental needs of both current and aspiring managers.

There were 8 sessions for this conference:

1.	**Chair's Welcome**	Very good introduction by Lena Johnson from the RCN Institute of Nursing Excellence discussing on the role of a manager and how this aligns to the national standards of developing our workforce
2.	**Experiences of a Ward Manager: Lived Experience**	This session was on the importance of making meaningful connections, practical tips on improving communication as a leader, and prioritising your wellbeing in a role with multiple competing priorities
3.	**Developing Your Ward Leadership Skills**	Impactful discussion on the current national issues (Ten-Year Health Plan, NHS Staff Survey) and the significance of creating a community to gain support and working together in challenging times
4.	**Supporting Nurses in Difficulty and Managing Performance Concerns**	This session underscored ways on how to better understand contributory factors and ensuring our staff are supported within the context of risk management and managing safety incidents
5.	**Supporting New Ward Managers**	Powerful talk by Prof. Karen Dawber, Chief Nurse of Bradford Teaching Hospitals, on the values of equality, representation and authenticity, and how these influence your approach to leadership
6.	**Ward Accreditation and Meeting the CQC Assessment Framework**	Updates on CQC and the managerial responsibilities of not just being compliant with quality statements, but also on demonstrating patient outcomes in relation to best practices and continuous improvement
7.	**Developing QI Capacity and Capability**	This session highlighted the primary drivers in Quality Improvement, and how managers and nurse leaders can utilise this systematic approach in shaping a culture of innovation and improvement
8.	**Managing your own Ward Budgets, Finances and Resources**	Fantastic closing session by David Bailey, Finance Consultant, on how good budgeting can benefit patients, gaining access to financial information, and in building key working relationships with accountants

Reflective Report:

Overall, I would strongly recommend this conference to both emerging and established nursing leaders. Although the event was not specific to critical care as a speciality, many of the insights were directly transferable to the leadership challenges I face in my role.

Critical care settings demand a high level of visibility, emotional resilience, and coordination across multidisciplinary teams. This conference reinforced the importance of compassionate leadership within management and clinical practice, and being vigilant to both local and national issues surrounding the NHS, as these can impact our decision-making and influence better ways of providing safe, kind and excellent care to the sickest patients in our hospitals.

My main key take-away messages from this conference are:

- Integrating quality improvement – this is very important for our patients, and sometimes it's the small changes that make the biggest impact to patient care. Building a culture of continuous improvement also means engaging staff to lead change and take ownership.

- Protecting our staff is fundamental – this includes upskilling, building workforce resilience, and presenting equal opportunities to grow both personally and professionally. The RCN Nursing Workforce Standards is a recommended read.

- Continuing to find opportunities to develop yourself as a leader – this not only helps in improving both leadership and managerial skills to meet demands for service delivery, but ultimately this helps to shape the future of our NHS.

- Being kind to yourself – we face multiple challenges in healthcare across all job roles, and sometimes we also forget to look after ourselves. It's important to acknowledge our limitations even as nursing leaders, and knowing where to find support as required.

Many thanks to HC-UK for arranging such an impactful event.

I would also like to say thank you to BACCN, especially to Sarah Gilliland, for facilitating my attendance despite my short notice of request, but in doing has enabled me to engage with recent updates on nursing leadership and management. The learnings will inform both my personal development and the improvement work I lead in critical care.