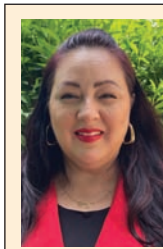


Representation and the Value of Latino Nurse Leaders

Building solid recruitment and retention strategies

It is projected that Latino individuals will make up 21% of the U.S. population by 2030,¹ yet only about 7% of the 3.9 million nurses in the profession today identify as Latino.² For decades, there has been a call to action to increase the number of nurses from underrepresented backgrounds, but despite these efforts and mounting evidence that culturally concordant health care is preferred among patients,³ the lack of representation of Latino nurses continues. The absence of Latino nurses in leadership roles is also a pressing issue in growing the workforce.⁴ American civil rights activist Marian Wright Edelman stated it simply: “You can’t be what you can’t see.”

It is important for nursing colleagues to understand what it means to be Latino in the United States. First, being Latino is not a monolithic experience. Latino people represent various races and constitute a diaspora of Indigenous North, Central, and South America, and Indigenous Caribbean, African, and Spanish ancestry. With a rich tapestry of more than 20 countries, Latino individuals may self-identify based on culture, heritage, language, lineage, nationality, or race.



Growing a diverse nursing workforce requires diverse nursing leaders.

stand a patient’s lived experience.⁵ Latino nurses deserve to be seen as more than a token on the team who checks the box for diversity or free translation services. Latino nurses have strong connections to their communities and can provide public health education and guidance on where patients can access safe, culturally sensitive care.

Developing, supporting, and retaining Latino nurse leaders. As many organizations look to increasing racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity among their nursing workforce, it is imperative that a solid strategy be established to achieve these recruitment and retention goals. A necessary step nurse leaders can take is to assess the current hospital culture as it relates to Latino nurses. Latino nurses have reported feeling undervalued, that they must continually demonstrate competency, that they are not respected for who they are, and that despite their achievements, they are often overlooked for leadership opportunities.⁶ Despite added responsibilities like translating for Spanish-speaking patients, Latino nurses often earn less than their White counterparts.⁷ They have also reported experiencing bullying, bias, and negative comments about their accents or ethnicity^{6,8} and often experi-

Latino nurses have reported experiencing bullying, bias, and *only-ness*—instances of being the only Latino nurse in their department.

Latino nurses are highly skilled in clinical practice, nursing science and research, and leadership, but are often omitted in visual images of the profession. While many Latino nurses are valued for their ability to communicate effectively with Spanish-speaking patients, being bilingual is not their only asset. Latino nurses are bicultural and utilize cultural strengths to under-

stand *only-ness*—instances of being the only Latino nurse in their department.⁸ With 69% of Latino nurses reporting that they have personally experienced racism in the workplace,⁹ health care organizations have a responsibility to listen to Latino nurses’ experiences. A culture of employee safety must be created in the workplace with zero tolerance for racism.

National nursing organizations can also recognize the contributions of Latino nurses in American his-

provide leadership opportunities for Latino nurses on their professional growth journey.

Latino nurses have much to contribute to DEI initiatives—and need to be at the table where decisions are made about their communities.

tory. Many ethnic minority nurses are left out of stories and celebrations at the institutional and academic nursing levels. Hispanic heritage celebrations can include recognizing staff and their contributions to nursing. Growing the workforce pipeline remains ineffective, and for Latino low-wage health care workers, employers can consider strategies like tuition reimbursement, partnerships with local nursing schools, and mentoring employees on the journey to becoming nurses.¹⁰ Nurturing these team members in supportive environments is crucial.¹¹

For early career nurses, it is never too soon to engage in attaining professional development goals. Hiring managers can engage Latino nurse employees in growth opportunities such as leading unit-based shared governance and serving on hospital committees. Nurse leaders can also play an integral part in new nurses' professional development by offering classes on precepting, the role of the charge nurse, meeting facilitation skills, unit-led quality improvement, journal clubs, and evidence-based policy improvement. Opportunities such as nursing grand rounds are a great way to highlight Latino nurses and can provide a visual message that the organization sees the value in their diverse teams. Latino nurses have much to contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives—and beyond—and need to be at the table where decisions are made about their communities.

Nurse leaders in health care facilities can engage in personal reflection on hiring practices and seek to remedy their current leadership structure when it doesn't fully reflect the communities they serve. They can learn about organizations that support underrepresented nurses and welcome local chapters of these organizations to their facilities. Nurse leaders can budget for expenses for nurses to attend ethnic minority nursing conferences where they can identify with Latino nurse leaders and find mentors with whom they feel understood. Meeting other nursing professionals with similar lived experiences can reinforce a sense of belonging and serve as a bridge until such time as the workplace can provide Latino nurse mentors. Ethnic minority nursing organizations can also

provide leadership opportunities for Latino nurses on their professional growth journey. Growing a diverse nursing workforce will require diverse nursing leaders. Latino nurse leaders are uniquely poised to serve the growing population of Latino people in the United States and are ready to step up and bring a professional skill set to health care leadership, including knowledge and awareness of the social determinants of health that affect their communities¹¹ and an unwavering commitment to address the disparities experienced in those communities.⁵ By valuing and recognizing what Latino nurses bring to the table, nurse leaders can encourage and support the Latino nurse leaders of tomorrow. ▼

Kim Ann Kim is a diabetes nurse educator at the Moses Weitzman Health System Community Health Center in Meriden, CT. Contact author: mkimi@yahoo.com. The author has disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.

REFERENCES

1. U.S. Census Bureau. *2017 national population projections tables: main series. Projections for the United States: 2017 to 2060. Projections of race and Hispanic origin.* Washington, DC; 2021 Dec 8. Data and maps; <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2017/demo/popproj/2017-summary-tables.html>.
2. Smiley RA, et al. The 2022 national nursing workforce study. *J Nurs Regul* 2023;14(Suppl 1):1-90.
3. Crespo-Fierro M. The benefits of a diverse nursing workforce. *Am J Nurs* 2023;123(3):17-8.
4. Cuellar NG, Cheshire M. Leadership challenges in building a Hispanic nursing workforce. *Nurse Lead* 2018;16(1):43-7.
5. Villarruel AM. A framework for Latino nursing leadership. *Nurs Sci Q* 2017;30(4):347-52.
6. Mocerri JT. Bias in the nursing workplace: implications for Latino(a) nurses. *J Cult Divers* 2012;19(3):94-101.
7. Frogner BK, Schwartz M. Examining wage disparities by race and ethnicity of health care workers. *Med Care* 2021;59(Suppl 5):S471-S478.
8. Mocerri JT. Hispanic nurses' experiences of bias in the workplace. *J Transcult Nurs* 2014;25(1):15-22.
9. National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing. *Racism in nursing: report series.* Silver Spring, MD: American Nurses Association; 2022. <https://www.nursingworld.org/~49c4d0/globalassets/practiceandpolicy/workforce/commission-to-address-racism/racism-in-nursing-report-series.pdf>.
10. National Association of Hispanic Nurses. *NAHN position paper: nursing workforce diversity.* Lexington, KY; 2020. Policy and advocacy; <https://nahnet.org/policy/NAHN-position-paper-nursing-workforce-diversity>.
11. Egues AL. Experiences of mentoring influences on the personal and professional growth of Hispanic registered nurses. *Hisp Health Care Int* 2013;11(4):173-80.