

56th International Conference on Nursing Leadership and Management

May 12-13, 2025

Webinar

Eleanor Hughes, J Nurs Care 2025, Volume 14

Fostering inclusive leadership in nursing: A United Kingdom model for diversity, equity, and workforce sustainability

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Statement: The healthcare workforce in the United Kingdom is becoming increasingly diverse, yet disparities in leadership representation and inclusion persist. Inclusive leadership has been identified as a key driver for improving team performance, staff retention, and culturally competent care. This study evaluates a nationwide initiative implemented within NHS Trusts aimed at developing inclusive leadership competencies among nurse leaders to promote equity and sustainable workforce development.

Methodology: A longitudinal study was conducted over 12 months involving 10 NHS Trusts across England. The intervention included an Inclusive Leadership Development Programme (ILDLP) comprising workshops, mentorship pairing with diverse staff, bias-awareness training, and cultural competency assessments. Data were collected via pre- and post-program surveys (n=500), leadership behavior self-assessments, and semi-structured interviews with participating nurse leaders and staff from underrepresented backgrounds. The program outcomes were analyzed using a mixed-methods framework combining thematic analysis and statistical comparison.

Result: Post-program surveys demonstrated a 40% increase in leaders' self-reported cultural competency and a 30% improvement in inclusive communication practices. Staff from minority ethnic backgrounds reported a 25% rise in perceived psychological safety and leadership support. Retention improved in high-diversity departments by 18%, and inclusive practices were integrated into recruitment and decision-making policies in 8 out of 10 participating Trusts. Qualitative insights revealed enhanced mutual respect, reduction in unconscious bias incidents, and a stronger sense of belonging among nursing teams.

Biography

Eleanor Hughes is a Senior Nurse Researcher and Policy Consultant at the Royal College of Nursing, UK. With over two decades of experience in health equity, workforce development, and nursing leadership, she has led national programs addressing diversity and inclusion in healthcare. Dr. Hughes holds a PhD in Nursing Leadership and is a Fellow of the Royal College of Nursing. She advises NHS leadership boards on inclusive policy frameworks and mentors emerging leaders across the UK. Her work has contributed to shaping a more equitable healthcare system both nationally and internationally.

Received: December 21, 2024; **Accepted:** December 22, 2024; **Published:** May 13, 2025
