Are all nurses leaders? Please explain your response.” This was a question posted on the discussion board by the professor in my Doctor of Nursing Practice leadership course. Before the start of that first semester of graduate study, my response would have been some nurses are leaders and some are followers. During the semester, I took a deep dive into the Institute of Medicine (IOM, 2011) report The Future of Nursing, engaged in many in-depth discussions with my classmates, and spent some time on self-reflection. My perspective has been changed forever. All nurses are leaders at some level.

My nursing career has spanned 32 years, and I have had many leadership opportunities along the way. As a newly licensed registered nurse, I was fast-tracked into the leadership role of charge nurse for a 62-bed surgical unit. The next opportunity came as a nurse educator for that unit, followed by an assistant nurse manager and clinical nurse specialist (CNS). I had a challenging and eye-opening experience as a nurse manager and finally returned to my most rewarding and current role as a CNS for surgical oncology at a university hospital.

Volunteering in AMSN presented additional leadership opportunities I never dreamed were possible. I began my volunteer leader experience as a member and chair of the Clinical Practice Committee. I assumed the role of treasurer on the board of directors, president-elect, and president. Being at the right place at the right time and being willing to say, “yes, I will try that” opened many doors. The experiences and friendships developed along the way will last a lifetime.

Full Partners

How does that relate to your practice as a medical-surgical nurse? In key message #3, the IOM (2011) emphasized nurses should be full partners with physicians and other members of the health care team as the system in the United States is redesigned. While some nurses did not begin their careers thinking about leadership roles, nurses must be leaders not only in the design of health systems but also in the implementation and evaluation. It sounds exactly like the nursing process!

Nurses are charged with developing evidence-based improvements to care and becoming involved actively in changing policy to incorporate these advances into the practice setting. Everyone from the bedside to the boardroom must work collaboratively to identify and achieve common goals. Nurses must be informed decision makers. Our decisions must be based on education as well as evidence and experience. Nursing leadership is needed at all levels and across all care settings. The IOM (2011) specifically called for nursing leadership at the student level, on the front-line, in the community, among chief nursing officers and nurse researchers, and in nursing organizations.

Clinical Leadership Development Program

AMSN leaders are committed to providing resources for medical-surgical nurses. To that end, we are thrilled to be releasing the Clinical Leadership Development Program in 2015. Our volunteer leaders have developed the content and AMSN is collaborating with HealthStream to create the learning platform.

Ten modules will be included in this online course. The leadership topics have been designed specifically for medical-surgical nurses practicing in direct care. Here is a sneak preview of the modules:

1. The Power of the Nurse Leader at the Bedside
2. Motivation at Work
3. Healthy Practice Environments Matter
4. Understanding Hospital Systems to Enhance Your Contributions to Professional Practice Activities
5. Foundation of Quality Care
6. Core Measures and HCAHPS
7. National Patient Safety Goals
8. Costs Drivers in Health Care
9. Using Evidence to Reduce Variations in Practice
10. Critical Appraisal of Clinical Evidence

We hope AMSN members and medical-surgical nurses will take advantage of this solid educational program to develop or enhance their leadership skills.

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All Nurses Are Leaders

Developing leadership skills is challenging as well as rewarding. Throughout my career, I have had mentors who have provided guidance. I believe it is our responsibility as nurse leaders to share our wisdom with our colleagues. Take the time to seek a mentor and discuss your career plans. That person will have a wealth of knowledge to share and may spark an interest in a path you have not considered previously. If you are currently a seasoned nurse, seek mentoring opportunities. Taking an active part in developing nurses for future leadership roles has been a personally rewarding component of my career.

I challenge you to find opportunities to continue to develop your leadership skills. The AMSN Clinical Leadership Development Program is a course I strongly encourage you to complete. Maybe this is the right time in your life to participate in a hospital council as a member or chair. Answering a call to volunteer for AMSN may be in your future for 2015. Seek new experiences. Rely on mentors for advice and guidance. Become an active participant in the redesign of health care. Wherever you are in your career path, remember, all nurses are leaders.

REFERENCE