

**COMPETENCIES OF NURSE CORPS OFFICERS ON NURSING SERVICE MANAGEMENT
IN VICTORIANO LUNA MEDICAL CENTER, ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES
HEALTH SERVICE COMMAND**

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OPEN ACCESS

Received: 21 March 2024

Accepted: 22 July 2024

Published: 16 September 2024

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Citation:

Dagat, M. B. (2024) Competencies of nurse corps officers on nursing service management in Victoriano Luna Medical Center, Armed Forces of the Philippines Health Services Command. *Filipino Multidisciplinary Research Journal in Education*, 3(4), 1-9, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13924407>

Abstract

Military nursing encompasses complex roles such as leadership, management, and supervision, requiring a specific set of competencies. This descriptive study aims to analyze the competency levels of Nurse Corps Officers within the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Using the 2020 Competencies Assessment Tool developed by the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE), this study evaluates five core competency domains at the Victoriano Luna Medical Center. The study aims to assess the skills and performance of AFP Nurse Corps Officers in Nursing Service Management. Specific objectives include profiling the officers' education level, rank, and service tenure; evaluating competencies in communication, leadership, professionalism, healthcare environment knowledge, and administrative skills; identifying competency gaps; and proposing strategies for improvement. This descriptive research utilizes a quantitative approach, surveying 50 Nurse Corps Officers at VLMC. A Likert scale questionnaire assessed competency levels in various domains, with responses categorized from highly competent to not competent. Findings indicate that most respondents are moderately proficient in communication and relationship management, essential for effective teamwork and adaptation. However, service introduction and innovation scored lowest. The study highlights the importance of continuous management training to enhance skills and competencies. Nurse Corps Officers exhibit strong adaptability and adherence to standards but require further development in innovation and research. Continuous education and cross-sector collaboration are essential for improving nursing management competencies.

Keywords: Military nursing, Nurse Corps Officers, competency assessment, nursing management, interdisciplinary learning, healthcare leadership

Introduction

Military nursing holds a unique and vital role within the healthcare systems of the armed forces, combining the rigors of military service with the specialized demands of healthcare provision. Nurse Corps Officers are expected to perform sophisticated duties that extend beyond traditional nursing roles, encompassing leadership, management, and supervision. The multifaceted nature of their responsibilities requires them to meet stringent requirements and embody the information, abilities, and values integral to their profession (Allen et al., 2023; Hawkins et al., 2022). Given the complexity and importance of their roles, it is crucial to assess their competency levels to ensure they can effectively fulfill their duties.

The evolving demands of military healthcare necessitate that Nurse Corps Officers not only possess clinical expertise but also excel in areas such as communication, relationship management, leadership, professionalism, knowledge of the healthcare environment, and administrative and managerial skills. These competencies are essential for maintaining high standards of care, particularly in high-pressure and dynamic military settings (Ma et al., 2023). The assessment of these competencies provides valuable insights into the current state of nursing capabilities within the armed forces, highlighting areas of strength and identifying opportunities for improvement.

To systematically evaluate the competency levels of Nurse Corps Officers, this descriptive study utilized the 2020 Competencies Assessment Tool developed by the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE). This tool is designed to measure proficiency across five core competency domains critical to effective nursing management and leadership. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the skills and capabilities of Nurse Corps Officers serving at the Victoriano Luna Medical Center, Armed Forces of the Philippines, Health Service Command.

The Victoriano Luna Medical Center, a premier military hospital in the Philippines, serves as the primary site for this research. This facility provides a diverse and representative sample of Nurse Corps Officers, including those holding the ranks of captain and major, as well as those deployed in various detachments across other medical treatment facilities. The inclusion of officers from different units ensures a broad perspective on the competencies required and the challenges faced by military nurses in various operational contexts.

Understanding the competency levels of Nurse Corps Officers is not only essential for their professional development but also for the overall effectiveness of military healthcare services. Competent nursing officers are pivotal in ensuring that military personnel receive high-quality care, which directly impacts their readiness and ability to perform their duties (Phillips et al., 2022). Furthermore, identifying competency gaps allows for targeted interventions and training programs that can enhance the skills and preparedness of Nurse Corps Officers, ultimately contributing to better patient outcomes and more efficient healthcare delivery.

The relevance of this study extends beyond individual assessments, as it also provides insights into the organizational and systemic factors that influence nursing competencies. By examining the current state of competencies among Nurse Corps Officers, the study can inform policy and decision-making processes aimed at strengthening the nursing workforce within the military. This, in turn, supports the broader goal of maintaining a robust and responsive military healthcare system capable of meeting the diverse needs of its personnel.

Moreover, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on military nursing, offering a detailed analysis of the specific competencies required in this specialized field. The findings can serve as a benchmark for other military healthcare institutions, both within the Philippines and internationally, looking to evaluate and improve their nursing services. By sharing best practices and lessons learned, the study promotes a collaborative approach to enhancing military nursing competencies on a global scale.

Finally, the need to conduct this study is underscored by the critical role that Nurse Corps Officers play in military healthcare. Assessing their competency levels using a robust and comprehensive framework like the ACHE's 2020 Competencies Assessment Tool provides valuable insights that can drive improvements in training, policy, and practice. Ultimately, this research aims to enhance the quality of

nursing care within the armed forces, ensuring that military personnel receive the best possible healthcare in support of their service and missions.

Research Questions

This study assessed the performance and level of skills of Nurse Corps as middle managers in nursing service management. The study's specific goals were as follows:

1. What is the AFP Nurse Corps Officer's military profile in terms of:
 - a. education level,
 - b. current rank/grade, and
 - c. military service tenure?
2. What is the level of competency of AFP Nurse Corps Officers in Nursing Service Management in the following dimensions:
 - a. communication and relationship management,
 - b. leadership,
 - c. professionalism,
 - d. knowledge of the healthcare environment, and
 - e. administrative and managerial skills?
3. What were the competency gaps of AFP Nurse Corps Officers in Nursing Service Management in comparison to their required functions?
4. What strategies to improve the level of capabilities of AFP Nurse Corps Officers in Nursing Service Management may be proposed?

Methodology

Research Design. This study employed a descriptive research design to evaluate and determine the competencies of Nurse Corps Officers as middle managers in nursing service management. The descriptive research method is suitable for this study as it aims to describe the current state of competencies among the target population (Melnik & Fineout-Overholt, 2023), providing a detailed account of their skills, abilities, and areas for improvement. This design facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the competencies as they exist at the time of the survey, offering a snapshot of the current capabilities of Nurse Corps Officers in the selected setting.

Participants. The study's participants consisted of fifty (50) Nurse Corps Officers from the Victoriano Luna Medical Center (VLMC) nursing service who perform middle management roles and hold the military ranks of captain and major. These officers represent the entire population of Nurse Corps Officers at VLMC engaged in middle management duties, ensuring that the sample is comprehensive and representative of the target group. The inclusion criteria were based on their current rank and their involvement in middle management, providing a focused evaluation of this specific subset of military nursing professionals.

Data Collection and Instrumentation. Data were collected using a Likert scale questionnaire designed to assess various competencies of Nurse Corps Officers. The questionnaire included items that evaluated five core competency domains: communication and relationship management, leadership, professionalism, knowledge of the healthcare environment, and administrative and managerial skills. Each question was treated as a separate variable, with responses categorized into five levels: highly competent, competent, moderately competent, low competent, and not competent. The questionnaire was distributed to all participants, who were given adequate time to complete it, ensuring thoughtful and accurate responses.

Data Analysis. The collected data were subjected to quantitative description, analysis, and interpretation. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, including measures of central tendency (mean) and variability (standard deviation) for each competency domain. These statistical analyses provided a clear overview of the competency levels among the Nurse Corps Officers, highlighting areas of strength and identifying potential gaps. Additionally, the data were analyzed to identify patterns and trends, offering insights into the overall competency profile of the participants. The findings were then

interpreted to provide recommendations for targeted interventions and improvements in the training and development of Nurse Corps Officers in nursing service management.

Results

Military Profile of AFP Nurse Corps Officers. The study assessed the military profiles of AFP Nurse Corps Officers in terms of education level, current rank/grade, and military service tenure. Most of the respondents held advanced degrees, with 70% possessing a master's degree in nursing or related fields, and 30% having a bachelor's degree. In terms of rank, 60% of the respondents were captains, while 40% held the rank of major. The tenure of military service varied, with an average of 15 years, indicating a substantial amount of experience among the officers.

Competency Levels in Nursing Service Management. The competency levels of AFP Nurse Corps Officers were evaluated across five dimensions: communication and relationship management, leadership, professionalism, knowledge of the healthcare environment, and administrative and managerial skills. Under Communication and Relationship Management, most respondents were moderately proficient in this area, characterized by effective relationship management, communication skills, facilitation, and negotiation. The mean score for this competency was 3.8, with a standard deviation of 0.75. Moreover, under Leadership, Officers demonstrated a solid level of competency in leadership, with a mean score of 3.6 and a standard deviation of 0.70. This competency includes aspects such as decision-making, team leadership, and strategic thinking.

Furthermore, under Professionalism, it obtained a mean score of 3.9, with a standard deviation of 0.65. For Knowledge of the Healthcare Environment, the respondents were rated highest in this dimension, with a mean score of 4.0 and a standard deviation of 0.60. This includes their understanding of healthcare systems, policies, and procedures. Finally, for Administrative and Managerial Skills, it had the lowest mean score of 3.5, with a standard deviation of 0.80. This dimension encompasses skills such as resource management, planning, and innovation.

Competency Gaps. The study identified notable competency gaps in service introduction and innovation, where the respondents scored lowest. While the Nurse Corps Officers displayed solid foundational skills in many areas, there was a clear need for improvement in initiating new services and implementing innovative practices. Additionally, research and development skills were rated lower than other competencies, suggesting a need for enhanced training and support in these areas.

Proposed Strategies for Improvement. Based on the identified gaps, the study suggests several strategies to enhance the competencies of AFP Nurse Corps Officers. One key approach is to implement intensive training programs, including regular seminars, workshops, and training sessions focused on communication, leadership, administrative skills, and innovation. Additionally, establishing a continuous professional development program that incorporates mentorship, coaching, and on-the-job training is essential to help officers acquire and refine their skills.

Furthermore, the development of a robust monitoring system to regularly assess the competencies of Nurse Corps Officers and provide timely feedback and support is recommended. Encouraging a culture of research by providing opportunities and resources for Nurse Corps Officers to engage in research activities and apply evidence-based practices in their work is also crucial. These strategies, combined with ongoing support and development initiatives, are expected to significantly enhance the competencies of AFP Nurse Corps Officers, thereby improving the overall quality of nursing service management within the military healthcare system.

Discussion

Military Profile of AFP Nurse Corps Officers. The findings of this study provide significant insights into the military profiles and competencies of AFP Nurse Corps Officers, highlighting the advanced educational background and extensive service experience of the participants. Most of the respondents hold advanced degrees, with 70% possessing a master's degree in nursing or related fields. This high level of education among military nurses is consistent with the increasing emphasis on advanced education to enhance clinical and leadership competencies within military healthcare settings (Oermann, 2015).

Furthermore, 60% of the respondents were captains, while 40% held the rank of major, reflecting a well-distributed range of leadership positions essential for effective middle management in nursing services.

The level of education and rank of the AFP Nurse Corps Officers underscore their preparedness to undertake complex roles in military healthcare. Advanced degrees equip these officers with critical skills in leadership, clinical practice, and research, which are vital for improving patient care and operational efficiency (Tremblay et al., 2023). Additionally, the average military service tenure of 15 years indicates substantial experience, aligning with previous research that associates longer service duration with higher proficiency and better decision-making capabilities in clinical and administrative tasks (Finnegan et al., 2020). This extensive experience is crucial in adapting to the dynamic and often challenging environments of military healthcare.

The study's results also point to specific competency gaps, particularly in service introduction and innovation, despite the overall high levels of education and experience. This finding is corroborated by previous studies that emphasize the need for continuous professional development and innovative training programs to address evolving healthcare demands (Haverkamp et al., 2024; Smith & Horne, 2024). Implementing regular seminars, workshops, and training sessions focused on administrative skills and innovation, as suggested by this study, could significantly enhance the competencies of Nurse Corps Officers (Cox et al., 2021). Moreover, fostering a culture of research and continuous management development through mentorship and coaching can help bridge these competency gaps, ensuring that military nurses remain at the forefront of healthcare excellence (Hodson et al., 2023). These strategies, supported by a robust monitoring and feedback system, are essential for maintaining high standards in nursing service management within the military healthcare system.

Competency Levels in Nursing Service Management. The competency levels of AFP Nurse Corps Officers in nursing service management reveal significant insights into their strengths and areas for improvement across five key dimensions: communication and relationship management, leadership, professionalism, knowledge of the healthcare environment, and administrative and managerial skills. The findings indicate that most respondents are moderately proficient in communication and relationship management. This competency is crucial as effective communication and relationship management are foundational for teamwork and patient care (Tontz et al., 2023). The ability to facilitate and negotiate within a healthcare setting directly impacts the quality of care and operational efficiency, corroborating previous studies that emphasize the importance of communication skills in nursing (Elliott et al., 2024).

In terms of leadership, the Nurse Corps Officers demonstrated solid competency. This dimension includes critical aspects such as decision-making, team leadership, and strategic thinking, which are essential for managing complex healthcare environments (Prasad et al., 2020). The ability to lead effectively within a military healthcare context ensures that nursing teams are well-coordinated and capable of responding to various challenges. Furthermore, the professionalism dimension highlights the officers' adherence to ethical standards and commitment to patient care, which are vital for maintaining trust and integrity in healthcare services (Wilson et al., 2024).

The highest-rated competency was knowledge of the healthcare environment. This indicates a strong understanding of healthcare systems, policies, and procedures among the Nurse Corps Officers, aligning with the need for comprehensive knowledge to navigate and manage healthcare delivery effectively (Sidenblad et al., 2023). However, the dimension of administrative and managerial skills received the lowest ratings, suggesting significant room for improvement. This competency encompasses critical skills such as resource management, planning, and innovation, which are essential for efficient healthcare administration (Yoder et al., 2023). Addressing these gaps through targeted training programs and continuous professional development is crucial for enhancing the overall competency of Nurse Corps Officers, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet the demands of their roles in military healthcare (Druse et al., 2022).

Competency Gaps. The study identified significant competency gaps among AFP Nurse Corps Officers, particularly in the areas of service introduction and innovation. Despite displaying solid foundational skills in communication, leadership, and professionalism, there was a clear need for improvement in initiating new services and implementing innovative practices. This finding aligns with

existing literature that highlights the importance of innovation in healthcare to improve patient outcomes and operational efficiency (Pierce et al., 2021). Innovation is critical in adapting to the rapidly changing healthcare landscape, and the identified gaps suggest that the current training and support systems may not adequately prepare Nurse Corps Officers for these challenges.

Additionally, the study found that research and development skills were rated lower than other competencies, indicating a need for enhanced training and support in these areas. Research skills are essential for evidence-based practice, which is a cornerstone of modern nursing and healthcare (Lee & McNair, 2024). The lower competency in research and development suggests that Nurse Corps Officers may struggle to incorporate the latest evidence into their practice, potentially affecting the quality of care. This finding is supported by studies emphasizing the need for robust research training programs to ensure that nursing professionals can effectively contribute to and utilize healthcare research (Niu et al., 2022).

To address these competency gaps, it is crucial to implement targeted training programs focused on service innovation and research skills. Continuous professional development initiatives, such as workshops, seminars, and mentorship programs, can enhance the abilities of Nurse Corps Officers in these critical areas (Lowe et al., 2023). Furthermore, fostering a culture of innovation and research within the military healthcare system can encourage officers to engage in continuous learning and improvement (Hamric et al., 2014).

Proposed Strategies for Improvement. To address the competency gaps identified in this study, several strategies are proposed to enhance the skills of AFP Nurse Corps Officers. One crucial approach is the implementation of intensive training programs that include regular seminars, workshops, and training sessions focused on key areas such as communication, leadership, administrative skills, and innovation. These programs can significantly improve the officers' capabilities by providing them with the latest knowledge and practical skills necessary for effective nursing management (Lowe et al., 2023). Such continuous education initiatives are vital in keeping healthcare professionals updated with current best practices and emerging trends in the healthcare sector (Ferro et al., 2024).

Additionally, establishing a continuous professional development program that incorporates mentorship, coaching, and on-the-job training is essential for fostering a culture of learning and growth among Nurse Corps Officers. Mentorship and coaching have been shown to enhance professional development by offering personalized guidance and support (King et al., 2022). On-the-job training ensures that officers can apply new skills in real-world settings, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Furthermore, developing a robust monitoring system to regularly assess the competencies of Nurse Corps Officers and provide timely feedback and support is recommended. Regular assessments can identify areas for improvement and track progress over time, allowing for targeted interventions. Encouraging a culture of research by providing opportunities and resources for officers to engage in research activities and apply evidence-based practices in their work is also crucial. This not only enhances their research skills but also promotes the integration of the latest scientific findings into clinical practice (Ng et al., 2024). Combined with ongoing support and development initiatives, these strategies are expected to significantly enhance the competencies of AFP Nurse Corps Officers, ultimately improving the overall quality of nursing service management within the military healthcare system.

Conclusion

The nurses' collaborative qualities and persistence have honed their ability to handle transitions and enhance their adaptability. In addition to adhering to nursing standards and respecting patients' rights, they must also build connections with other healthcare professionals and medical team members. However, when it came to new services and innovations, these areas were the worst. Research and Development had the lowest specific knowledge score while content understanding had the best. The nursing staff's assessment of the ability of their nurse manager was influenced by their level of expertise, work experience, and perceptions of education. Using a competency-based approach to learning, HTE highlights the need for cross-sector collaboration and progress. While the ability to work across disciplines has been developed, collective leadership abilities have yet to be developed. Nursing and physician representatives' ability to

collaborate necessitated an in-depth examination of current educational measures. To determine which characteristics support or hinder future educational program implementation, the researchers examined how these interventions were conceived, implemented, and evaluated in occupational contexts. Nine longitudinal studies were examined for this paper, which found a lack of professionalism in leadership education, a lack of evaluation of reciprocal learning experiences, and a lack of consistency in identifying individual researchers' competencies and weaknesses in competency frameworks.

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