Reflections of a Junior Leader…

Recently, as part of my time as a student nurse on the National Junior Leadership Academy (NJLA), I was given the opportunity to join the Foundation of Nursing Studies for two weeks as an intern. It was a chance for me to be able to observe the leadership styles of a range of leaders including how they exert personal influence and personal effectiveness, behaviours and habits. It was also an excellent opportunity to improve my understanding of some of the key challenges facing nursing, the roles that different types of organisations play in meeting those challenges and how those approaches are shaped and visioned by leaders in those organisations.

Here are a couple of lines from my diary at the end of day one:

“Just finished first day with FoNS: learning lots about improvement, facilitating, change, development, how one has to understand a culture or problem and why it is that way before one can begin to make changes to it, foster innovation, overcome resistance…”

Now, at the end of my two weeks, I can safely say, I have been able to fulfil what I had hoped to as part of my internship on the NJLA.

From what I have experienced the tagline of FoNS (Inspire, Enable, Improve) perfectly sums up the ethos of FoNS’ work. They are inspiring and enabling, through expert facilitation, nurses to improve as individuals and teams. Primarily I have learnt about and observed ‘emancipatory practice development’ through my time with the FoNS team and so have been able to observe, identify and begin to emulate and think about how I can develop my own skills as a facilitator of practice development. This, for me, has been very useful as a potential future leader. The attributes needed to be a practice developer include: ability to work with values and beliefs, commitment to improving patient care, enabling not telling, facilitation skills, energy and tenacity, flexibility, sensitivity and reflexivity, knowledge, creativity, political awareness and credibility. For me, from what I personally believe and what I’ve come to believe through my explorations of leadership and being a “boat rocker”, all the qualities listed above are essential to effective leadership and what I hope to develop. Interestingly, as part of the National Junior Leadership Academy we attended leadership retreats and at the first one, we created “mood boards” that reflected and articulated our ideas of leadership … all of the above attributes were included in those mood boards.

Through FoNS, I have become more aware of what can help structure and change practice with the main emphasis on introducing opportunities for reflection, such as clinical supervision and action learning along with working with nurses and exploring creative approaches to understand and change practice. I was introduced to so many ideas, approaches, tools and methods, including emancipatory practice and transformational development, action research, enabling facilitation, caring conversations, appreciative inquiry, person centred nursing, innovation, different leadership styles and the formation of a workplace culture. It has been a truly great learning experience for me and has opened my eyes in many ways. Looking back, the two weeks spent with FoNS has definitely given me a good grounding and foundation on which to build. Through my observations of teams I have come to understand more the importance of staffing and skill mix, working with values,
creating a shared vision and the leadership required to facilitate and create the conditions within the team for individuals to learn, collaborate, support, challenge and reflect. Although I am just about to enter my second year of the Nursing BSc, these skills and tools will undoubtedly be fundamental to me in practice both as a nurse and as a potential future leader in more ways than I can describe and the two weeks has left me wanting to know, learn and develop further in this field of practice development. I cannot thank the FoNS team enough for opening their doors to me and would encourage any nurse to spend some time with them and use their expertise, for me it has been great.

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