Editorial/Uvodnik

International cooperation in nursing leadership

Mednarodno sodelovanje v vodenju zdravstvene nege

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In a period of rapid and numerous changes, diverse values, and the coexistence of multiple generations in the same workplace setting, nurse leaders face an increasingly complex range of demands. However, when entering the international professional arena, it becomes clear that, although organisational structures may differ, similar issues arise everywhere, such as staff shortages, increasingly complex patient care, professional autonomy, quality and safety, managerial responsibility, and sustainability of the working environment. However, certain commonalities persist regardless of the country or organisational context of nursing practice. This makes it difficult to discuss the future of the profession without serious consideration of nursing leadership.

Nursing leadership should not be understood solely in terms of administrative or hierarchical roles, but as a discipline that significantly influences the quality of care, safety, organisational outcomes, and the professional development of staff (Losty et al., 2026; Sayyed et al., 2025). International experience shows that developing leadership in nursing is a long-term process requiring systematic investment in education and training, as well as the involvement of leaders in organisational management (Koto-Shimada et al., 2023). International cooperation is therefore not a peripheral activity, but a means of broadening professional perspectives, comparing different practices and gaining a clearer understanding of one's own system. This is also confirmed by reflections on work within the leadership structures of professional associations. Erstad et al. (2024) emphasise that such a role benefits not only the individual leader, but also has positive effects on the home organisation and the wider profession. It is not merely about forming professional connections, but about strengthening the ability to collaborate, think critically, and engage in clear written and oral communication. Through such work, leaders learn about best practices and gain new perspectives, which they can apply to organisational development and more reflective leadership practices upon returning to their home institution.

The European Nurse Directors Association (ENDA) is a professional European organisation that brings together nursing leadership and management, strengthening professional dialogue at the European level. Slovenia's active involvement in its activities enables the integration of its professional perspectives and examples of good practice into the wider European network. ENDA fulfils its mission by bringing together nursing leaders from various European countries to share expertise and experience, participate in professional events, influence education and continuing professional development, develop common quality standards, collaborate in research projects, and thereby ensure the contribution of nurse directors to policy-making processes (ENDA, n. d.). Such international engagement is valuable for Slovenia, not as a search for answers elsewhere in Europe, but as a means of contributing our own experiences and insights. International collaboration is particularly valuable when it enables participants to listen, compare, and contribute, rather than functioning as a one-way exchange. International collaboration programmes in ENDA follow a similar pattern, with value attributed not only to shared nursing experiences but also to a broader understanding of different healthcare systems. Furthermore, such collaboration reinforces the importance of effective communication and fosters cultural humility, which is essential for working in international professional settings (Gingerich et al., 2024). In its Code of Ethics, ENDA emphasises that those in nursing leadership roles must act with personal integrity and transparency,

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and promote a culture of personal and professional responsibility grounded in trust and mutual respect. It further highlights the importance of cultivating a healthy and sustainable working environment, supporting mentoring and leadership development, and strengthening professional values and nursing identity (ENDA, 2024).

This emphasis is closely linked to nurses' professional identity. Pullen & Schroeder (2025) define professional identity as a dimension of nursing that not only provides the profession with internal support but also shapes its standing and recognition in relation to other health professions. This emphasis carries significant implications for professional development, as it invites reflection on how nursing is positioned within the broader professional landscape and how it is recognised. It is therefore not enough for nursing to merely exist within the system. It is crucial that it also carries influence, that its voice is heard, and that it is able to make decisions regarding the quality of care and the long-term direction of its development. In this context, Lang & Nash (2023) point out that leadership does not emerge spontaneously. Where training for leadership roles is insufficient, and where support and opportunities for development are lacking, more is expected of leaders than the system actually enables them to achieve. It is therefore essential to understand leadership as a discipline that must be learned and developed systematically, through both mentoring and experience. This highlights a crucial aspect of autonomy, which cannot be meaningfully addressed without serious reflection on leadership.

If we understand leadership as a professional field that must be learned, systematically developed, and supported by the creation of appropriate conditions, then autonomy cannot be viewed merely as a buzzword or a symbol of prestige, but as one of the fundamental prerequisites for mature and effective leadership. A meta-analytical review of support for autonomy in the workplace shows that such a leadership approach is based on the leader's ability to understand employees' perspectives and to allow them adequate opportunities to participate, take initiative, and make responsible decisions, while communicating in an informative rather than controlling manner (Slemp et al., 2018). The broader literature on management also emphasises that perceived autonomy enables leaders to integrate diverse leadership approaches more easily and to link their role more purposefully to organisational goals (Grøn et al., 2024). For nursing, this is a particularly sensitive aspect of leadership, as leaders often bear considerable responsibility but do not always have sufficient influence over the conditions in which they are expected to fulfil it. Much attention has been devoted to nursing leadership, primarily focusing on the importance of relationships, the working environment, staff retention and recruitment, mentoring, and communication. However, far less attention is paid to the acknowledgement that leadership practice in nursing is still too frequently treated as an extension of clinical professional work, rather than as an independent professional field requiring its own knowledge, appropriate training and, above all, time.

Gaps persist in formal leadership training, alongside insufficient development opportunities and the need for a more systematic approach to building leadership competencies and succession planning (Lang & Nash, 2023). Moreover, while expectations of leaders are rising, many enter this role ill-prepared, facing increasing staffing and organisational pressures that further add to their workload (Losty et al., 2026). This is another reason why there is growing recognition that leadership development is not sufficiently effective if it remains detached from the actual work culture and daily practice (Cable et al., 2024). In this context, international collaboration holds significant developmental value, as it not only facilitates comparisons between systems, but also offers a broader perspective on leadership, a better understanding of diverse professional environments, and a clearer awareness of what is truly crucial for the future of nursing (Gingerich et al., 2024). The international platform thus raises a fundamental professional question: what kind of nursing do we wish to develop, and what kind of leadership can support this? However, its impact is most enduring when it transcends mere symbolic connectivity and contributes to the development of leadership, further education, and the conditions in which the profession can actually fulfil its professional commitment (Koto-Shimada et al., 2023).

In this regard, international cooperation is one of the means by which nursing leadership is genuinely developed. Participation in leadership roles within professional associations helps cultivate skills that leaders then apply within their own organisations and beyond. This represents an investment in the development of leadership, maturity, greater professional breadth, and the capacity of nursing to shape its future direction more clearly (Erstad et al., 2024). It seems that today the issue is no longer so much a lack of understanding of the importance of leadership, but rather that it is still not given sufficient professional weight in daily professional practice. Amid the many day-to-day challenges, it is still too often pushed into the background, even though it should be regarded as one of the central areas of nursing development. The future will therefore depend not on the profession speaking out more loudly, but on greater professional clarity and a willingness to position the leadership role appropriately. This is precisely why international collaboration can be seen as one of the key contexts in which leadership maturity and the future directions of the profession are being shaped today.

Slovenian translation/Prevod v slovenščino

V času mnogih in hitrih sprememb, različnih vrednot ter sobivanja več generacij v istem delovnem okolju se vodje v zdravstveni negi srečujejo z zelo raznolikimi zahtevami. Ko vstopamo v mednarodni strokovni prostor, pa nam hitro postane jasno, da se načini organiziranosti med seboj sicer razlikujejo, vendar se povsod odpirajo sorodna vprašanja, kot so pomanjkanje kadra, vse večja zahtevnost obravnave, strokovna avtonomija, kakovost in varnost, odgovornost vodij, vzdržnost delovnega okolja itd. Ostajajo pa skupne točke ne glede na državo ali organizacijo, v kateri delujemo. Prav zato je danes težko govoriti o prihodnosti profesije brez resnega premisleka o vodenju.

Vodenja v zdravstvu ni mogoče razumeti zgolj kot administrativne ali hierarhične vloge, temveč kot stroko, ki pomembno vpliva na kakovost oskrbe, varnost, organizacijske izide in profesionalni razvoj zaposlenih (Losty et al., 2026; Sayyed et al., 2025). Mednarodne izkušnje kažejo, da je razvoj voditeljstva v zdravstveni negi dolgoročen proces, ki zahteva sistematično vlaganje v izobraževanje in usposabljanje ter vključevanje vodij v upravljanje (Koto-Shimada et al., 2023). Mednarodno sodelovanje zato ni obrobna dejavnost, temveč eden od načinov, kako širimo strokovni pogled, primerjamo različne prakse in jasneje razumemo lasten sistem. To potrjuje tudi razmislek o delu v vodstvenih strukturah strokovnih združenj. Erstad et al. (2024) poudarjajo, da takšna vloga ne koristi le posameznemu vodji, temveč se njeni učinki prenašajo tudi v domačo organizacijo in širšo profesijo. Pri tem ne gre zgolj za pridobivanje novih poznanstev, ampak za obliko razvoja, v kateri se krepijo sposobnost sodelovanja, prav tako kritično mišljenje ter jasna pisna in ustna komunikacija. Vodje skozi takšno delo spoznavajo dobre prakse in pridobivajo nove poglede, ki jih lahko po vrnitvi v domače okolje preoblikujejo v razvoj in bolj premišljeno vodenje.

European Nurse Directors Association (v nadaljevanju ENDA) je evropska strokovna organizacija, ki povezuje vodstveni kader zdravstvene nege ter krepi strokovni dialog na evropski ravni. V njenem delovanju ima aktivno vlogo tudi Slovenija, kar odpira možnost, da se strokovni pogledi in primeri dobre prakse vključujejo v širše evropsko stičišče. ENDA svoje poslanstvo gradi na povezovanju vodij zdravstvene nege iz različnih evropskih držav, na izmenjavi izkušenj, sodelovanju na strokovnih dogodkih, vplivu na izobraževanje in nadaljnje usposabljanje, razvoju skupnih standardov kakovosti, sodelovanju v raziskovalnih projektih ter prispevku managementa v zdravstveni negi k procesu političnega odločanja (ENDA, n. d.). Takšna mednarodna vključenost je pomembna za Slovenijo, ne zato, ker bi v evropskem prostoru zgolj iskali odgovore drugje, temveč zato, ker vanj prinašamo tudi lastne izkušnje. Mednarodno povezovanje je dragoceno predvsem tedaj, ko ni enosmerno, ampak ko znamo poslušati, primerjati in tudi prispevati. Podobno kažejo tudi programi mednarodnega sodelovanja v izobraževanju vodij, kjer se kot posebej dragocene ne izkažejo le skupne izkušnje zdravstvene nege, temveč tudi širše razumevanje različnih zdravstvenih sistemov. Ob tem takšno sodelovanje krepi pomen učinkovite komunikacije in spodbuja kulturno ponižnost, ki je za delo v mednarodnem strokovnem prostoru nujna (Gingerich et al., 2024). ENDA v svojem kodeksu etike poudarja, da morajo nosilci vodstvenih vlog v zdravstveni negi delovati z osebno integriteto, izjemno poštenostjo ter zaupanjem in medsebojnim spoštovanjem ustvarjati kulturo osebne in profesionalne odgovornosti. Izpostavlja tudi skrb za zdravo in vzdržno delovno okolje, podporo mentorstvu in razvoj voditeljstva, pa tudi krepitev profesionalnih vrednot in identitete zdravstvene nege (ENDA, 2024).

Tak razmislek se tesno povezuje tudi s profesionalno identiteto zdravstvene nege. Pullen & Schroeder (2025) profesionalno identiteto razumeta kot tisto razsežnost zdravstvene nege, ki stroki ne daje le notranje opore, temveč vpliva tudi na njen položaj in težo v odnosu do drugih zdravstvenih strok. Ta poudarek ima razvojno vrednost, saj odpira vprašanje, kako je zdravstvena nega v širšem strokovnem prostoru sploh umeščena in kako v njem prepoznana. Zato za zdravstveno nego ni dovolj, da je v sistemu le navzoča. Ključno je, da ima tudi težo, da je njen glas upoštevan in da zmore prevzemati odločitve za kakovost dela ter za dolgoročno smer razvoja profesije. Ob tem Lang & Nash (2023) opozarjata, da se vodenje ne razvije samo od sebe. Če za vodstveno vlogo ni dovolj usposabljanja, predvsem pa podpore in priložnosti za razvoj, potem od vodij pričakujemo več, kot jim v resnici omogočamo. Zato je nujno vodenje razumeti kot stroko, ki se je je treba učiti in ga razvijati načrtno, tako z mentorstvom kot z izkušnjami. Tako se odpre še eno odločilno poglavje avtonomije, ki je brez resnega premisleka o vodenju ni mogoče zares nasloviti.

Če vodenje razumemo kot strokovno področje, ki se ga je treba učiti, ga načrtno razvijati in zanj ustvarjati ustrezne pogoje, potem avtonomije ne moremo obravnavati zgolj kot parole ali simbola prestiža, ampak kot enega od temeljnih pogojev za zrelo in učinkovito vodstveno delovanje. Meta-analitični pregled o podpori avtonomiji v delovnem okolju kaže, da takšen vodstveni pristop temelji na sposobnosti vodje, da razume perspektivo zaposlenih in jim omogoča dovolj prostora za sodelovanje, samoiniciativnost in odgovorno odločanje, pri tem pa komunicira informativno in ne nadzorovalno (Slemp et al., 2018). Tudi širša literatura s področja managementa opozarja, da zaznana avtonomija vodji omogoča, da lažje usklajuje različne smeri vodenja in svojo vlogo bolj smiselno povezuje z organizacijskimi cilji (Grøn et al., 2024). Za zdravstveno nego je to še posebej

občutljiv del vodenja, saj vodja pogosto nosi veliko odgovornost, nima pa vedno enakega vpliva na pogoje, v katerih naj bi jo uresničil. O vodenju v zdravstveni negi govorimo veliko. Predvsem o pomenu odnosov, klime, zadržanja in pridobivanja kadra, mentorstvu, komunikaciji in še bi lahko naštevali. Mnogo manj pa smo pripravljeni priznati, da je vodstvena praksa v zdravstveni negi še vedno prepogosto obravnavana kot podaljšek klinično strokovnega dela, ne pa kot samostojno strokovno področje, ki zahteva lastno znanje, ustrezno usposabljanje in predvsem čas.

Na področju vodenja ostajajo vrzeli v formalnem usposabljanju, pri tem pa primanjkuje razvojnih priložnosti in bolj sistematičnega grajenja vodstvenih kompetenc ter nasledstva (Lang & Nash, 2023). Hkrati pa se pričakovanja do vodij povečujejo, številni pa ob vse večjih kadrovskih in organizacijskih pritiskih, ki dodatno povečujejo njihovo obremenitev, v to vlogo vstopajo premalo pripravljeni (Losty et al., 2026). Tudi zato je vse večje spoznanje, da razvoj voditeljstva ni dovolj učinkovit, če ostaja ločen od dejanske delovne kulture in vsakodnevne prakse (Cable et al., 2024). Pri tem ima mednarodno sodelovanje pomembno razvojno vrednost, saj ne prinaša le primerjave med sistemi, ampak tudi širši pogled na vodenje, boljše razumevanje različnih strokovnih okolij in jasnejše zavedanje o tem, kaj je za prihodnost zdravstvene nege v resnici ključno (Gingerich et al., 2024). Mednarodna platforma tako postavlja bistveno strokovno vprašanje, kakšno zdravstveno nego želimo razvijati in kakšno upravljanje jo pri tem lahko podpre. Dolgoročni učinek pa ima predvsem tedaj, ko ne ostane le pri simbolni povezanosti, ampak prispeva k razvoju voditeljstva, dodatnega izobraževanja ter pogojev, v katerih lahko stroka svojo strokovno zavezo tudi dejansko uresničuje (Koto-Shimada et al., 2023).

V tem smislu je mednarodno sodelovanje eden od načinov, kako se vodenje v zdravstveni negi zares gradi. Vključevanje v vodstvene vloge strokovnih združenj razvija veščine, ki jih vodja prenaša tudi v svojo organizacijo in širše. Gre za razvojno naložbo v zrelost vodenja, v večjo strokovno širino in v sposobnost, da zdravstvena nega jasneje oblikuje svoje prihodnje usmeritve (Erstad et al., 2024). Zdi se, da danes ne gre več toliko za to, da bi nam manjkalo razumevanje o pomenu vodenja, ampak bolj za to, da mu v vsakdanjem delu še vedno ne uspemo dati dovolj strokovne teže. Ob številnih vsakodnevnih izzivih še vedno ostaja prepogosto potisnjeno v ozadje, čeprav bi moralo biti obravnavano kot eno od osrednjih področij razvoja zdravstvene nege. Prihodnost zato ne bo odvisna od večje glasnosti stroke, ampak od večje strokovne jasnosti in od pripravljenosti, da vodstveno funkcijo postavimo tja, kamor sodi. Prav zato je mogoče mednarodno sodelovanje razumeti kot enega ključnih prostorov, kjer se danes oblikujejo voditeljska zrelost in naše lastne usmeritve.

Conflict of interest

The author confirms that there are no conflict of interest./Avtor izjavlja, da ni nasprotja interestov.

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