

Intergenerational Diversity: What Nurse Managers Need to Know

An electronic search of MEDLINE, PubMed, and CINAHL databases was completed using the words generational diversity, *nurse managers*, and *workforce* between 2000 and 2012, with the purpose of examining generational differences and their impact on the nursing workforce and their effect on the work environment. Four generational cohort groups were identified in the literature according to the nurse's date of birth:

The Veterans (1925–1945)

Description: Nurses who lived through the great world wars, experienced economic hardship; hierarchical; remain in the workforce after normal retirement age due to government incentives to prevent a brain drain

Characteristics: Loyal, disciplined, value teamwork, respect for hard work and authority; most hold senior-level health management positions rather than more physically demanding direct care positions

Baby Boomers (1946–1964)

Description: Grew up during period of economic prosperity and free expression; believe they are "entitled"; "Living to work" is the motto of this driven and dedicated cohort

Characteristics: Look to external sources for validation of their worth; equate work with personal fulfillment; competitive, strong willed; seek immediate gratification; want to be noticed and valued for their contribution through work-related perks or recognition, for example, salary increases, promotions, titles, office with a window, and reserved parking

Generation X (1965–1980)

Description: Individualistic in their approach to work, do not value team work; value outcomes more than process

Characteristics: Like to manage their own time, set their own limits, and complete their work without supervision; familiar with ambiguity, uncertainty, and flexibility; cohort values balance between work and personal or family life; well suited to a job market that is characterized by a great deal of change and little stability

Millennials (1980–present)

Description: Thrive on maintaining a balance between home and work; seamless in the way they play and work; adaptable to change; technology dependent; like to challenge assumptions

Characteristics: Enjoy strong peer support and team work; good at synthesizing large amounts of information quickly; job portability and lateral career moves are important to this cohort; rapid technology change sometimes results in the neophyte to the workforce being expert in the critical skill of information gathering and management

Clinical Implications

When working with generational diversity in the nursing workforce, nurse managers need to

- Recognize and value each generation's unique contribution to the provision of safe, culturally congruent, and competent patient care
- Respect the different ways in which nurses from each generation are instrumental in creating a cohesive workplace
- Be aware that each generation of nurses manifests differences in the 3 C's—communication, commitment, and compensation
- Promote collaboration and productivity among nurses from different generations
- Keep the patient as the focal point of all communications and nursing actions
- Highlight mutual team goals
- Encourage nurses from different generations to support one another and resolve conflicts amicably among themselves

When nurse managers acknowledge generational characteristics, they're able to develop strategies that focus on effective communication techniques, mentoring, motivation, appropriate technologies, and ethics of nursing to bridge the gap between generations of nurses and increase nursing workforce cohesion.

Reference: Hendricks, J. M., & Cope, V. C. (2013). Generational diversity: What nurse managers need to know. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 69(3), 717–725.