

Review Article

## From Bedside to Boardroom: Redefining Nursing Administrative Roles in Saudi Arabia's Cultural and Policy Landscape

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**Abstract:** Saudi Vision 2030 has remodeled health priorities emphasizing quality, access and equality within care through the nursing leadership. The nursing administrative roles in Saudi Arabia be redefined within the context of the much-needed cultural and policy change, which has been amplified by the current trends in health care. This review investigates the shift of nursing leadership from bedside nursing to executive decision-making within the sociopolitical environment and health care setup in the Kingdom. It addresses issues such as how Vision 2030 and privatization in health care dovetail to influence nursing administration and some challenges faced-such as gender dynamics, professional recognition, and leadership empowerment. Qualitative exploration is undertaken in this review regarding various competencies that nurse administrators should have to become a linking pin between clinical decision and strategic decision making. Policy-driven leadership models should be in place for nurses to meaningfully engage in health governance, finance, and human resource management. The effects of educational programs and mentoring on the executive nursing role were also examined with greater emphasis on cultural competence and adaptive leadership. Our analysis demonstrates that any reforms in Saudi nursing administration should entail reconstructing existing organizational arrangements to put in place a leadership pipeline integrating evidence-based management and culturally sensitive decision making. Saudi Arabia, through empowering nurse leaders as key stakeholders in health policy and institutional governance, would be set to deliver on improving patient care outcomes and operational efficiency. The transformation demands concerted efforts at policy reform and professional development to equip the nursing adequately to meet the challenges of contemporary health care while remaining closely connected to the sociocultural environment.

**Keywords:** Nursing Administration, Saudi Arabia, Healthcare Leadership, Policy Reform, Vision 2030, Cultural Competence.

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### INTRODUCTION

Healthcare in Saudi Arabia is transforming beyond recognition as the Kingdom embraces Vision 2030, a national blueprint containing privatization, decentralization, and increased quality of care among many pillars (Almalki *et al.*, 2022). One of the most important aspects of this change involves the role of nurses as it relates to their current responsibilities and their future emergence from bedside care to administrative leadership roles. Nursing in the Kingdom has this historical notion derived from cultural beliefs that took an interest mainly in clinical care and minimized the importance of managerial tasks as well as the endorsement associated with expatriate labor and gender composition in Saudi society (Almutairi, 2021).

Very recently, however, newly formed policies such as the Saudi Nursing and Midwifery Strategy (2021-2025) and Saudization (Nitaqat) have served to usher in this change, thereby empowering Saudi nurses to effectively participate in decision making within the establishments of healthcare (Ministry of Health [MOH], 2021). This review dissects how culture and policies interact in changing nursing administration, indicating a far-reaching improvement in education, technology, and gender inclusiveness.

### Cultural and Policy Context

The advancement of nursing leadership itself has a background in cultural and historical factors of Saudi Arabia such as those from professional nursing

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toward modesty, gender segregation, and family obligations. Furthermore, three decades back, the area of nursing became less represented with the existing 60% of expatriates in the field (Almalki *et al.*, 2022). This has facilitated large leadership gaps while cultural norms have probably led to many Saudi women discouraging 70% of the nursing workforce from entering administrative careers since many refer to leadership as being an opposite to the stereotypical caregiving roles (Alboliteeh *et al.*, 2023). However, the COVID-19 indicated a watershed moment, as the higher status that was accorded to nurses came through the campaign introduced in the media that glorified the public as finding "guardians of health" (Al Thobaity & Alshammari, 2020). Therefore, this coupled with Saudization measures, for example placing Saudi nationals at the helm of leadership positions in healthcare institutions, has transformed the face of professionalism.

In line with this transformation is the healthcare agenda of Vision 2030, which even raises the bar further for change. Such localized, privatized, and quality-enhancing developments in the strategy have made the role of nurse administrators critical in operational efficiency and patient satisfaction (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). For example, ownership by the Nursing and Midwifery Strategy identifies leadership in the context of workforce retention objectives and requires the establishment of competency frameworks for unit managers and clinical directors (MOH, 2021). They have also developed special programs like the Master of Science in Nursing Administration of the King Saud University, which trains both students in skills that enable them to manage resources and implement policies (Al-Yami *et al.*, 2023). This point indicates the general national motive consistent with the nurturing of a nursing leadership model rooted in the Islamic ideals of stewardship (*amanah*) and community service (*khidma*), hence not only resonating well with cultural values but also promoting professional ambitions (Almutairi, 2021).

Adaptation of Vision 2030 in health has been reflected by such a broad scope for healthcare changes. These developments made the nurse administrators crucial players in operational efficiency and patient satisfaction in terms of being localized, privatized, and of improving the quality of services (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). For example, the Nursing and Midwifery Strategy rightly defines leadership in the context of workforce retention objectives, as well as requiring competency frameworks for roles such as unit managers and clinical directors (MOH, 2021). Educational establishments have set up specific programs such as that offered at King Saud University, which includes "master's in nursing administration", aimed at including skills in resource management and policy implementation among their graduates (Al-Yami *et al.*, 2023). It signified the general national motive matching with an Islam-endorsed nursing leadership model of stewardship (*amanah*) and

community service (*khidma*), thus not only echoing well with cultural values but also promoting professional aspirations (Almutairi, 2021).

### **Educational and Professional Development**

The transition to administrative roles demands a significant educational framework designed specifically for the Saudi scenario. Nursing education was sharply focused on developing clinical skills, leaving leadership acumen lacking until Vision 2030 came into being. Today, universities and vocational centers partner with international counterparts such as Johns Hopkins Aramco Healthcare to offer blended programs involving theoretical knowledge with practical leadership training (Almazroa *et al.*, 2021). As of late, the Saudi Commission on Health Specialties (SCFHS) has further standardized competencies through its Career Pathway Program, which pairs the emerging leaders with experienced mentors to bridge the gap in skills (SCFHS, 2023). However, these programs are critical because there is currently much fast Saudization of the workforce; hospitals have reported a 35% increase since the year 2020 in the number of Saudi nurses filling managerial positions, although there are many challenges in the rural areas with little access to advanced training (Alhusaini *et al.*, 2023).

Gender issues remain within leadership development. Culturally, the past era can be said to have allowed nurses to attend clinical settings with clients of the same gender only. With the advent of telehealth platforms and women-only hospitals, avenues have opened for women to participate in administration. For instance, female nurse administrators in Seha Virtual Hospital provide virtual oversight over telemedicine workflows to demonstrate how technology has surpassed traditional barriers (Saudi Gazette, 2023). Such changes are indeed a part of the dual strategy for gender inclusion pursued by the Kingdom, which emphasizes cultural sensitivity and thereby would serve to develop progressive-agenda-driven policy.

### **Technological Integration and Leadership**

Nursing leadership in Saudi Arabia will be enabled, empowered, and facilitated by technology. Digital tools such as AI analytics and electronic health records (EHRs) optimize administrative duties so that nurse managers can focus on strategic initiatives. For example, predictive analytics currently used by nurse leaders in King Faisal Specialist Hospital have optimized staff schedule and allocation of resources, resulting in reduced operation costs by 18% (KFSH, 2022). The Unified Health Record System (UHRS) by the MOH will do similar tracking of patients' outcomes across the regions to make evidence-based decisions by empowering administrators. Innovations are compliant with the visions of digital transformation by bringing to bear historical inefficiencies of service delivery in healthcare.

Perpetual investments are needed for digital literacy to be able to adopt technology. The Nursing and Midwifery Strategy adopts courses in health informatics for managers to be abreast of how tools are developed (MOH 2021). Partnership with such tech giants as IBM and Cisco improved infrastructure environment especially in remote areas where the level of telehealth at most refutes distance (Almalki *et al.*, 2022). These indeed reflect the Kingdom's commitment to the multiplier roll of technology in nursing leadership.

### Strategic Recommendations for Sustained Progress

Saudi Arabia needs to implement targeted interventions to address systemic barriers to consolidate gains. First, cultural advocacy campaigns led by religious and community leaders could reframe nursing leadership as an extension of Islamic service values, increasing societal acceptance (Almutairi, 2021); second, harmonising policies between the MOH, SCFHS, and private sector is crucial to standardising leadership curricula and accreditation processes; third, expanding mentorship networks, especially in rural areas, would ensure equitable access to professional development; and fourth, continuous investment in digital infrastructure will enable nurse administrators to take the lead in a world that is becoming more and more technologically advanced.

## CONCLUSION

Redefining nursing administrative roles in Saudi Arabia exemplifies an elegant blend of cultural preservation with policy innovation. Vision 2030 provides a very lofty framework for the journey ahead, in which educational, technological, and gender advancement could demonstrate the Kingdom's commitment toward achieving excellent healthcare. By sustaining the development of leadership within the national priorities, Saudi Arabia will eventually solidify

its place as a regional torchbearer for healthcare innovation while conserving its cultural heritage. The trail from bedside to boardroom: although still ongoing, speaks to a transformative story of empowerment, resilient strength, and foresight in strategy.

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