

Tribute to Dr. Heather K. Spence Laschinger

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Dr. Heather K. Spence Laschinger

In late October 2016, I and countless others lost a colleague, mentor, teacher and friend, Dr. Heather K. Spence Laschinger. I have only admiration, respect and sheer awe for her research and theoretical knowledge that she applied in developing an outstanding research career over the past 30 years at the Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, at Western University in London, Ontario. Dr. Spence Laschinger made a significant footprint in healthy workplace research in nursing and health services in Ontario, Canada, and globally. Her programs of research involved the following three major foci: workplace empowerment; new graduate nurses' transition to the workplace, including the experience of workplace violence; and healthcare leadership.

Workplace empowerment

A major aim of Dr. Spence Laschinger's research was examining the link between nursing work environments and nurse and client outcomes with a particular focus on workplace empowerment. A key theme in this research was developing and testing the applicability of theory-driven approaches for creating healthy nursing work environments. She systematically developed this area of research that has significantly contributed to our understanding of what is required to create and sustain healthy workplaces for nurses and other healthcare providers. She developed and expanded on the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1993) in her model of structural empowerment, which was tested in many studies and samples of nurses in diverse settings (Spence Laschinger et al. 2001). The application of this model and the findings are essential foundational knowledge for any healthcare leader or manager.

New graduate nurses' transition to the workplace and workplace violence

New graduate nurses' transition to the workplace was her focus for the past seven years as the Arthur Labatt Family Research Chair in Human Resource Optimization at Western University. In particular, she had a significant influence

on knowledge related to new graduate nurses in the workplace, by investigating factors influencing new graduate nurses' successful transition to their full professional role in Canadian hospital settings and describing predictors of job and career satisfaction, turnover intentions and nurses' health outcomes. She completed two longitudinal studies on this topic: one completed in Ontario (Spence Laschinger and Fida 2014) and another was a national study, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)-funded *Starting Out Study* (Spence Laschinger et al. 2016); at the time of her death, she was currently working on a third. In June 2013, she organized and hosted a symposium at Western University on new graduate nurse research. This event included researchers from across Canada, the United States and Europe.

Healthcare Leadership

Dr. Spence Laschinger led a broad research program including leadership/management of nursing health services to ensure high-quality, safe care across nursing and healthcare sectors. Results of several national and provincial studies examining nurses and nurse leaders have shown that leaders in particular play a critical role in healthcare, with leadership influencing outcomes for patients, employees and organizations. She had infinite respect for the work and support of healthcare decision-makers and direct-care nurses in the development, conduct and translation of findings of a research study. In 2005, she led a national study that profiled nursing leadership/management structures, processes and outcomes in acute care settings across Canada (Spence Laschinger et al. 2008). In a follow-up study, called the *New Leader Study*, she investigated the personal and situational factors influencing direct-care nurses' aspirations to management roles (Spence Laschinger et al. 2013). When the study was completed, three knowledge translation events were held in the spring of 2012 with leaders across Canada in attendance. Findings supported the need to identify and develop direct-care nurses who show an interest in pursuing management, given a reasonable percentage (24%) indicated an interest in leadership/management.

She completed a large provincial SSHRC-funded study (2010) with her frequent collaborator, psychologist, Dr. Joan Finegan. They tested a multilevel model of the impact of leadership and work environments on unit and individual outcomes over time in a sample of staff nurses and their immediate managers (Spence Laschinger et al. 2009). Results documented the positive effects of unit-level leadership and structural empowerment on nurses' work outcomes such as organizational commitment. In addition, she co-led an intervention study, the *Enhancing Workplace Communities Study*, with Dr. Michael Leiter of Acadia University. In this study, they showed positive results of a workplace civility intervention on staff and organizational outcomes in Ontario and Nova Scotia hospital settings (Spence Laschinger et al. 2012).

Prolific Research Career

Her research grant and publication record is unquestionably exemplary: she published over 200 articles in refereed journals (205 and 5 recent submissions) including this journal. This record of scholarly writing has raised the profile of her work around the world and resulted in replications in other populations, such as, physiotherapy, social work, medicine, teaching and business, particularly in the area of empowerment. She wrote 17 chapters in books and 4 books and presented close to 400 presentations at professional meetings. During her career, Dr. Spence Laschinger received over \$3.52 million in funding for 39 grants as Principal Investigator (PI) and an additional \$15 million as a co-investigator for over 40 grants. She was funded through Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF), CIHR, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), among others. She supervised 70 (plus 26 as committee member for a total of 96) master's degree students; 9 (14 as committee member for a total of 23) PhD students; and 4 postdoctoral students.

Recipient of many prestigious awards

In 2003, Dr. Spence Laschinger was the first Canadian researcher to receive the prestigious Sigma Theta Tau International Elizabeth McWilliams Miller Award for Excellence in Research from the International Honour Society of Nursing to recognize her research contributions (empowerment) internationally for a body of work in an area important to nursing. In 2006, she was awarded the Distinguished University Professor Award at the University of Western Ontario, presented in honour of sustained excellence in teaching, research and service during an outstanding scholarly career at Western University, and in 2010, she was awarded the Hellmuth Prize at Western University, which is the top research award for recognizing distinguished researchers for achievement over a substantial body of work. She was elected (2008) to the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, considered one of the highest honours for individuals in the Canadian health sciences community. Internationally, she was inducted as a Fellow in the American Academy of Nursing (2009), a highly respected organization that recognizes researchers and scholars for their significant contribution to nursing knowledge development. She was recently (May, 2015) recognized by the American Organization of Nurse Executives with a research award for her significant contribution to leadership and work environment research. Organizers of the International Nursing Administration Research Conference (INARC) held in November in Orlando, Florida, dedicated this year's biannual conference to Dr. Spence Laschinger in recognition of her support for and research contributions at this conference for many years.

Policy Impact

In an effort to ensure that her research findings were translated into practice, collaboration with decision-makers and clinical nurses and other healthcare providers was a priority in all phases of Dr. Spence Laschinger's work. To that end, her work has resulted in a number of important contributions to policy making and program development at various levels of government. She was asked to serve on numerous expert panels as a consultant on nursing work-life policy task forces, both at the federal and provincial levels. She was one of two individuals in Ontario appointed as a *Healthy Work Environments Champion* for the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and a consultant with the Quality Workplace-Quality Health Care Collaborative, a national collaboration to promote the importance of high-quality healthcare work environments across the country. At the federal level, she served on an advisory committee of Accreditation Canada to develop healthy work environment indicators in hospital settings and was on the Research Advisory Committee of the *National Survey of Nurses' Health* conducted by Statistics Canada and Health Canada in 2005. She also served as a policy consultant to the Office of Nursing Policy within Health Canada. Internationally, she participated on the Advisory Committee for the Magnet Hospital Accreditation Center in Washington, D.C., in 2006 and 2008. Provincially, she led an RNAO advisory group that developed the Leadership Best Practice Guideline for creating healthy nursing work environments in a variety of work settings.

Summary

Dr. Spence Laschinger was a consummate scholar, role model and mentor for faculty, graduate students, organizational decision-makers and other researchers. On a personal level, she possessed a high level of curiosity for that "next great" research question, tremendous generosity of spirit and time for her colleagues and students, exemplified high standards for research inquiry and always spoke directly and clearly about how she saw things in the world. In summary, her leadership in nursing research, contributions and service to nursing organizations in relation to research, her advocacy for healthy workplaces for nurses and other healthcare providers, her work on new graduate nurses' transition to practice and the scope and breadth of research findings and their subsequent integration into practice and policy changes are testaments to an unbelievable research track record in nursing administration research.

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Collaborations with the *Canadian Journal of Nursing Leadership*

Dr. Spence Laschinger was a strong supporter of this journal for many years. A prolific author – perhaps the most prolific to ever publish in this journal – she was author or co-author on 10 peer-reviewed papers in as many years (see list below.) She was also a thorough and rigorous reviewer, providing suggestions and insights in her assessments that strengthened and improved the quality of many other manuscripts.

Her contribution is deeply appreciated and she will be missed.

– The Editors

Canadian Journal of Nursing Leadership

March 2004

Staff Nurse Empowerment and Effort–Reward Imbalance

Kinga M. Kluska, Heather K. Spence Laschinger and Michael S. Kerr

<http://www.longwoods.com/content/16247>

November 2004

Predictors of Nurse Managers' Health in Canadian Restructured Healthcare Settings

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March 2005

New Strategies for Monitoring the Health of Canadian Nurses: Results of Collaborations with Key Stakeholders

Michael S. Kerr, Heather K. Spence Laschinger, Colette N. Severin, Joan M. Almost and Judith Shamian

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March 2006

Processes of Care: Comparison between Nurse Practitioners and Physician Residents in Acute Care

Souraya Sidani, Diane Doran, Heather Porter, Sandra LeFort, Linda Lee O'Brien-Pallas, Catherine Zahn, Heather Laschinger and Sonia Sarkissian

<http://www.longwoods.com/content/18050>

September 2006

Workplace Empowerment, Work Engagement and Organizational Commitment of New Graduate Nurses

Julia Cho, Heather K. Spence Laschinger and Carol Wong

<https://www.longwoods.com/content/18368>

December 2006

Leader Empowering Behaviours, Staff Nurse Empowerment and Work Engagement/Burnout

Paula Greco, Heather K. Spence Laschinger and Carol Wong

<http://www.longwoods.com/content/18599>

March 2007

Exploring a Theoretical Foundation for the Professional Practice Leader Role

Sara Lankshear, Heather Laschinger and Michael Kerr

<http://www.longwoods.com/content/18786>

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The Effects of Emotionally Intelligent Leadership Behaviour on Emergency Staff Nurses' Workplace Empowerment and Organizational Commitment

Carol Young-Ritchie, Heather K. Spence Laschinger and Carol Wong

<https://www.longwoods.com/content/20614>

March 2014

Exploring Managers' Views on Span of Control: More Than a Headcount

Carol A. Wong, Pat Elliott-Miller, Heather Laschinger, Michael Cuddihy, Raquel M. Meyer, Margaret Keatings, Camille Burnett and Natalie Szudy

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September 2015

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