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MANAGEMENT OF NURSING STAFF WITH CONSIDERATION OF GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES: A LITERAURE REVIEW

Elżbieta Szlenk-Czyczerska[1 A-G]
• ORCID: 0000-0002-8145-6768

[1] Institute of Health Sciences, University of Opole, Poland

A – study design, **B** – data collection, **C** – statistical analysis, **D** – interpretation of data, **E** – manuscript preparation, **F** – literature review, **G** – sourcing of funding

ABSTRACT

Background: Modern healthcare facilities operate under conditions of dynamic demographic changes and a shortage of nursing staff, significantly affecting work organization and the quality of services provided. One of the main challenges for management is the effective leadership of multigenerational nursing teams, comprising representatives of the Baby Boomer, Generation X, Y (Millennials), and Z cohorts, who differ in values, professional expectations, and work styles.

Aim of the study: The purpose of this study is to analyze and systematize strategies for the effective management of multigenerational nursing staff, based on a literature review and generational characteristics.
Material and methods: The study is based on a review of recent scientific publications and reports available in databases such as PubMed and Google Scholar, focusing on human resource management in healthcare and generational diversity among nursing staff.

Results: Effective management of nursing teams requires a flexible and adaptive leadership style that considers the needs and expectations of different generations. Key strategies include mentoring, reverse mentoring, customized motivational systems, flexible working conditions, and support for professional development. Generational profiles influence motivation, communication, technological adaptation, and team collaboration.

Conclusions: Building an organizational culture based on mutual respect, dialogue, and cooperation fosters intergenerational synergy, improves team performance, reduces turnover, and enhances the utilization of nurses' potential across age groups. Strategic generational management strengthens the resilience and effectiveness of healthcare organizations.

KEYWORDS: personnel management, nursing, generations, diversity, mentoring

Background

The management of nursing staff in medical facilities is a key element in ensuring high-quality healthcare services and the efficient operation of healthcare institutions. Effective management encompasses a range of strategic and operational activities, including human resource planning, recruitment and selection processes, employee onboarding, motivation, professional development, and the optimization of working conditions. Equally important is the creation of an organizational culture that fosters collaboration and professional engagement [1].

In the context of dynamic changes in the healthcare system – such as the increasing demand for nursing services, an aging population, and generational diversity among employees – the role of the nursing manager is gaining significance. This requires not only administrative competencies but also strong interpersonal skills and the ability to manage a diverse team [2].

Nursing staff management must take into account factors such as employee health needs, work-life balance, and the prevention of professional burnout. Effective scheduling, clear division of responsibilities, regular competency assessments, and support for

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professional development all contribute positively to team morale and the quality of patient care. Furthermore, a well-designed motivational system tailored to the needs of different generational groups enhances engagement and staff retention [3].

Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to identify and describe effective strategies for managing nursing staff while taking generational diversity into account. The analysis focuses on the characteristics of individual generations and practices that support collaboration and the effectiveness of intergenerational teams.

Material and methods

A literature review was conducted covering the years 2010 to 2024, using the following databases: PubMed and Google Scholar. The search employed the following keywords (in both English and Polish): "generational diversity," "nursing staff," "human resource management," "mentoring," "Baby Boomers," "Generation X," "Generation Y," "Generation Z," and "nurse workforce." The review included peer-reviewed scientific publications as well as official reports from healthcare and professional organizations.

The choice of PubMed and Google Scholar was deliberate, based on the scope and relevance of these databases to the topic. PubMed is a highly reputable and widely used resource in the field of health sciences, offering access to peer-reviewed, high-quality medical and nursing literature. Google Scholar, on the other hand, provides a broader range of sources, including grey literature and recent research that may not yet be indexed in other databases. Together, these two platforms ensured access to both authoritative academic content and a wide spectrum of relevant materials in the context of generational diversity in the nursing workforce.

Results

Legal foundations for practicing as a nurse in Poland

The nursing profession in Poland is regulated by a strict legal framework, primarily defined by two key acts: the Act of July 15, 2011, on the Professions of Nurse and Midwife, and the Act of April 15, 2011, on Medical Activity. These laws outline the scope of professional rights, duties, educational requirements, and formal conditions necessary to obtain the right to practice. According to current legislation, nurses are authorized to independently perform a wide range of healthcare services, including identifying patients' health problems, planning and delivering nursing care, providing health education, and delivering selected diagnostic, therapeutic, and rehabilitative services. The law also permits nurses to issue prescriptions, referrals, and diagnostic test orders within a defined scope, significantly increasing their professional autonomy [4,5].

To obtain the right to practice, several formal requirements must be fulfilled, including graduation from an accredited nursing school or higher education program (bachelor's or master's degree), full legal capacity, absence of health contraindications, and adherence to appropriate ethical standards. This right is granted by the relevant District Chamber of Nurses and Midwives, and its acquisition enables legal practice within Poland [4,6].

In terms of professional qualifications, nurses are legally required to engage in continuous professional development, which is regulated by the 2024 Regulation of the Minister of Science. Postgraduate education includes specializations, qualification courses, specialist courses, and continuing education, which may be employer-funded and conducted in either full-time or part-time formats [4–7].

A key element of the system is the Registry of Nurses and Midwives, maintained by the Supreme Council of Nurses and Midwives. This registry contains detailed information on practitioners' credentials, places of employment, and professional qualifications. The registration system enables monitoring of the active nursing workforce and supports human resource planning in the healthcare sector [4].

It is important to emphasize that nursing practice extends beyond direct patient care. It also includes educational, research, and managerial activities, as well as participation in the work of professional self-government bodies. The multidimensional nature of the profession elevates the role of nursing as a vital component of the healthcare system and requires management to provide appropriate support and invest in the development of this professional group [4].

Structure of nurse employment in Poland

It is well established that the number and availability of healthcare professionals significantly influence the overall health status of the population [8]. Nurses represent one of the largest professional groups in the medical sector [9]. However, workforce shortages in this field are a global issue that undermines the effectiveness of healthcare systems and hinders the implementation of health policy. One of the key challenges in managing the nursing profession is the age structure of its workforce [10]. It is

important to note that the average age of nurses in Poland is steadily increasing (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Employed Nurses in Poland and Their Average Age in the Years 2012–2023 [11]

As of	Number of Employed Nurses	Average Age
31-12-2023	239 257	54.50
31-12-2022	236 414	54.10
31-12-2021	234 117	53.64
31-12-2020	231 612	53.16
31-12-2019	229 974	52.59
31-12-2018	228 250	52.03
31-12-2017	225 468	51.43
31-12-2016	221 911	50.79
31-12-2015	221 172	50.13
31-12-2014	218 783	48.43
31-12-2013	216 851	48.69
31-12-2012	209 272	46.94

Data on the age distribution of nurses confirms the high average age within this professional group. The largest category consists of individuals aged 51–60, who make up 31.1% of the total nursing population. The next largest group includes those aged 61–70, accounting for 25.7%. Additionally, 16.1% of all nurses fall within the 41–50 age range (Table 2) [11].

Table 2. Number of Nurses Employed in Poland by Age Group (as of December 31, 2023) [11]

	Employed Nurses (n)	Share of Total (%)
21–30	23 780	7.5
31–40	29 979	9.4
41–50	51 266	16.1
51–60	99 334	31.1
61–70	82 284	25.7
>70	32 375	10.2

Explanations: n – group quantity; % – percentage.

It is also worth noting that the nursing profession is predominantly female. According to data published by the Supreme Chamber of Nurses and Midwives (NIPiP), as of the end of 2023, only 9,593 men were working in this profession, which constitutes just 3.01% of the total number of individuals practicing this occupation (Table 3) [11].

Table 3. Structure of Registered Nurses by Gender [11]

Year	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
2013	27 507	98.23	4 964	1.77
2014	27 7334	98.16	5 188	1.84
2015	27 9861	98.07	5 515	1.93
2016	28 2547	97.97	5 848	2.03
2017	28 5542	97.86	5 542	2.14
2018	28 8774	97.73	6 707	2.27
2019	29 2437	97.60	7 182	2.40
2020	29 5571	97.48	7 640	2.52
2021	29 9604	97.33	8 228	2.67
2022	30 4365	97.18	8 848	2.82
2023	30 9425	96.99	9 593	3.01

Table 3 contd.

Explanations: n – group quantity; % – share of women/men in the total number of registered nurses.

Staffing challenges and human resource management in nursing

One of the greatest challenges in human resource management within the healthcare system is staff shortages, particularly among nurses [9,12]. The shortage of personnel, combined with the advanced age of many in this group, negatively impacts the quality and safety of patient care [13,14]. According to data from the Supreme Chamber of Nurses and Midwives (NIPiP), by 2030 Poland may face a shortage of up to 37,000 nurses, especially in the Silesian and Mazovian voivodeships [15].

Staff shortages force some employees to work in multiple facilities, increasing the risk of medical errors [16]. Therefore, effective personnel management requires rationalization of employment, implementation of strategic HR policies, and support for professional development [17,18].

Building a positive image of the nursing profession, promoting it among young people, and ensuring attractive career paths are also crucial [19]. Equally important is enhancing interpersonal and professional competencies through regular training and support from supervisors and management staff [20,21].

Managing staff in hospitals demands not only organizational oversight but also skills in collaboration, motivation, and ethical approaches to professional mobility [22,23]. Only a comprehensive approach to human resource management can ensure continuity of healthcare services and high-quality nursing care.

Generational diversity in the nursing environment

The modern workplace, including healthcare professions, is characterized by generational diversity. In the healthcare sector, especially among nurses, there

are currently representatives of four generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and Generation Z. Each group differs in its value system, work style, and expectations of employers and the professional environment [24,25].

Baby boomers (1945–1964)

This generation, raised in difficult and often unstable socio-economic conditions, has developed a strong work ethic, loyalty to the employer, and deep respect for authority. They value job stability, clear rules, and predictability in the work environment. Although they did not grow up in the digital age, they are capable of successfully adapting to new technologies, demonstrating openness to learning and change. Key motivational factors for them include recognition of their commitment and a sense of financial security. Their main expectations revolve around appreciation for their accumulated experience and professional stability; however, they face challenges related to the rapid pace of digital transformation and the need to effectively collaborate with younger, more dynamic generations [24,25].

Generation X (1965–1980)

Generation X, who grew up during a period of political and economic transformation, developed traits such as independence, pragmatism, and a strong sense of responsibility. They stand out for their ability to make autonomous decisions while also functioning well in team settings. They value job stability, but work-life balance is equally important to them. They expect opportunities for professional development and clear career paths, though they may be less receptive to pressure from rapid change or excessive organizational demands. A key challenge in working with this generation lies in maintaining their engagement while providing conditions that allow them to achieve professional goals without compromising their need for balance [24,25].

Generation Y – millennials (1981–1994)

This generation is characterized by a high level of career mobility and a strong focus on personal development. Core values guiding their professional choices include flexibility in work organization, the opportunity to participate in inspiring projects, and a positive workplace atmosphere. Rather than loyalty to a single employer, they prefer environments that allow them to pursue their passions and foster creativity. They demonstrate technological fluency and an innovative approach to problem-solving, yet they are often accompanied by impatience and a strong need for recognition. Among their key expectations are individualized treatment, prompt feedback, and clear development prospects. At the same time, they face challenges such as professional burnout and difficulty accepting traditional hierarchical structures [24].

Generation Z (born after 1995)

The youngest generation in the labor market, often referred to as "digital natives," grew up in a technology-saturated world, which enables them to navigate both digital and physical spaces with ease. They are characterized by high flexibility, technological proficiency, and a strong need for individualization. In the workplace, they value task diversity, teamwork, and dynamic development opportunities. Their expectations include clearly defined goals, access to mentorship, and space for learning and skill enhancement. Despite their many strengths, challenges for this generation include limited professional experience and difficulty maintaining focus, which makes strong adaptive support and a developmental work environment essential from the earliest stages of their careers [24].

Approach to work among generations X and Y – key differences

Generation Y, compared to Generation X, places greater value on education, attractive compensation, engaging work, and personal development. They prioritize interpersonal relationships, prestige, and job satisfaction. Millennials tend to have higher expectations, a strong drive for independence, and the pursuit of passions, often choosing career paths in management or entrepreneurship. They less frequently identify with traditional communities but seek connections with peers [24]. In contrast, Generation X is more loyal to employers, accepts hierarchical structures, and patiently awaits career advancement. Both generations value stability, professional growth, and work-life balance. Generation Y is sometimes seen as more demanding but also more focused on quality of life and self-fulfillment [24].

Generation Y and Z in the nursing environment – selected differences

The modern labor market, including the healthcare sector, is dominated by representatives of Generation Y (Millennials) and an increasingly large group from Generation Z. It is estimated that by

Table 4. Key Differences in Work Attitudes Between Generations X and Y [24]

Generations / Work-Related Values / Categories	Generation X	Generation Y (Millennials)
Dominant Trait	Skepticism, pessimists without illusions.	Realism, curiosity about the world, sense of freedom
Characteristics	Interest in innovation and business challenges based on solid data; loyal to employer, often workaholics, strong work ethic, not very self-confident, dislike hierarchy but respect authority of supervisors; need team support and sense of usefulness	Immersed in diverse media and experimental learning; highly aware of self-worth; high multitasking ability; less loyal to employer; often do not respect authority without competence; expect flexibility at work
Career Goal	Patiently wait for promotion or raise; "portable" career	Expect fast career growth, multiple parallel careers, borderless careers
Expected Rewards	Motivated by job satisfaction, high position, and prestige	Expect quick, well-paid jobs; focus on development, creativity, and openness at work
Work-Life Balance	Need for balance, but mostly after retirement; often workaholism and burnout occur	Work is not everything; strong need for flexibility and work-life balance
Job Change	Seen as a necessity, with fear of losing achieved positions	Commonplace; high job mobility, ease of adaptation, openness to change
Training and Development	Training viewed as employment security anchor	Lifelong learning is a way of life

2025, Generation Y will constitute about 75% of the active workforce, while Generation Z will make up about 20% [24]. Both groups differ in their professional expectations, approaches to work, and communication styles, which poses challenges for healthcare managers.

Motivation to work: For Millennials, the key motivating factor is high salary (over 40%), whereas Generation Z places greater emphasis on work flexibility and work-life balance [24,25].

Entrepreneurship: Generation Z shows a greater interest in starting their own businesses (17%) than Generation Y (11%), which may influence the development of independent nursing practices and changes in service delivery models [24].

Multitasking: Both generations demonstrate the ability to multitask, but Generation Y more often prefers performing multiple tasks simultaneously (66% vs. 54%) – a trait particularly important in nursing work [24].

Communication: Both groups prefer direct contact, which supports effective teamwork. Generation Z more frequently uses internet messengers, while Generation Y relies more on email [24].

Modern technologies: Despite technological proficiency, Generation Z perceives greater risks related to technology overuse (40% vs. 25% in Generation Y). In nursing, balancing technology use with patient-centered focus is essential [24].

Relations with supervisors: Both generations expect honesty and efficient communication from management. Generation Z more often requires immediate feedback, whereas Generation Y values greater autonomy [24].

Workplace preferences: Generation Z prefers flexible employment forms (e.g., telemedicine), while Generation Y places more importance on the prestige of the institution [24].

Job turnover: Both groups are more prone to job changes than older generations. Studies show that Millennials change employers on average five times during their careers, while Generation Z does so four times [24].

Generational diversity in nursing teams – conditions, challenges, and management directions

According to WHO forecasts, by 2030 the healthcare system may face a shortage of up to 18 million workers, which will increase pressure on already burdened medical staff [26]. At the same time, the growing generational diversity among nurses presents both a challenge and an opportunity for healthcare organizations.

The nursing environment includes representatives of several generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y (Millennials), and Z. Each is characterized by different approaches to work, expectations, and communication styles. Older nurses value stability and hierarchy, while younger ones prioritize flexibility, professional development, and modern technologies [25,27].

These differences may lead to conflicts, decreased engagement, employee turnover, and difficulties in collaboration [28,29]. However, well-managed generational diversity can improve team efficiency – older employees can act as mentors, while younger ones bring innovation [30].

Implementing generational management strategies that consider the needs and strengths of each group is crucial for maintaining stable and compe-

tent nursing teams. In the face of aging populations and staff shortages, skillful intergenerational integration can significantly improve care quality and job satisfaction.

Strategies for managing generational diversity

Managing generational diversity in healthcare is a significant challenge for managers, requiring leaders to be open to change, flexible, and capable of leveraging the potential of different generations without necessarily conforming to all their expectations [24,27]. It is important to emphasize that generations differ in their attitudes toward work: Baby Boomers are loyal and committed, valuing recognition and hard work; Generation X is independent and creative but less loyal to organizations; Generation Y is confident, multitasks, and expects flexibility and rapid development; Generation Z is pragmatic, results- and learning-oriented, though sometimes struggles with the practical application of knowledge [27].

Younger generations (Y and Z) place greater emphasis on work-life balance, shaping their expectations regarding the work environment. In intergenerational communication, preference differences are significant: older generations prefer direct contact, while younger ones favor digital forms, with Generation Z in particular drawn to social media. In relationships and cooperation, Baby Boomers demonstrate loyalty and social engagement, Generation X values individualism, while Generations Y and Z appreciate teamwork and diversity, although their levels of engagement may vary.

Regarding technology, all generations acknowledge its importance; however, Baby Boomers and some members of Generation X may experience adaptation difficulties, unlike the technologically proficient Generations Y and Z. In terms of leadership perception, younger generations prefer mentors, transparent communication, and partnership-based relationships, expecting quick feedback and participation in decision-making, whereas older generations value stability and respect.

Baby Boomers show the highest organizational commitment, while Generations Y and Z exhibit greater turnover and difficulty remaining in one workplace. The highest level of occupational burnout is observed in Generation X, whereas Generation Y copes better under limited resources but struggles in complex environments. Job satisfaction is highest among Baby Boomers and lowest among Generation Z. It is worth noting that for Generation Y, salary is a key satisfaction factor, while for older generations, autonomy and recognition are more important [27].

Strategies to promote intergenerational collaboration

Effective management of generational diversity in the nursing environment requires implementing strategies that promote cooperation rather than competition. Training on generational diversity, targeted at both nurses and leaders, is crucial to facilitate understanding of the needs and values characteristic of different generations, as well as to improve relationships and teamwork. It is recommended to tailor the work environment to the preferences of each group – from rewards for Baby Boomers, through flexibility for Generation X, to longer adaptation periods for Generation Y. Supporting effective communication and the exchange of experience between generations is also an important element [27].

Leaders should promote flexible work arrangements that address the needs of younger generations regarding work-life balance. Professional development and mentoring play a key role in integration – younger generations can share technological skills, while older generations contribute experience and knowledge. Regular feedback, recognition, and individualized development approaches foster engagement and growth across all age groups. Examples of best practices include mentoring programs, individual development plans, implementation of technologies supporting communication, and building an organizational culture based on collaboration and diversity [27].

Discussion

Managing nursing staff in the context of generational differences is a complex and dynamic issue that is particularly important in light of the growing challenges facing modern healthcare. Contemporary nursing teams include representatives from at least four generations – Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y, and Z – each characterized by different values, needs, and expectations regarding the work environment. Effective management of this diversity is crucial to ensuring high-quality care, increasing job satisfaction and team efficiency, as well as reducing turnover and burnout [27].

Older generations, such as Baby Boomers and Generation X, place great importance on stability, loyalty to the organization, and interpersonal relationships at work. They are more likely to make long-term professional commitments, value recognition and respect for their experience, and place significant emphasis on autonomy and remuneration. In contrast, younger generations Y and Z emphasize flexibility, work-life balance, and opportunities for rapid professional development. These generations are

more open to change but tend to change jobs more frequently in search of more satisfying conditions and work atmosphere [24].

Research indicates that nurses from younger generations, especially Generations Y and Z, value support from leaders, regular feedback, and professional recognition, which are crucial for their motivation and engagement. At the same time, mentoring programs where the experience of older generations is passed on to younger employees, while younger generations support older ones in technology, can effectively integrate nursing teams and build mutual trust [27].

Managing generational diversity in nursing teams requires a flexible approach that considers the unique needs of each generation. Key strategies include adjusting working conditions – such as scheduling, shift distribution, and workload – to the preferences of different generations. It is also important to introduce initiatives that promote collaboration and communication across generations, such as training programs on generational diversity, joint team activities, or workshops to improve interpersonal skills [29].

It is worth emphasizing that effective nursing staff management also requires an inclusive leadership style that enables all employees to actively participate in decision-making and clinical practice management. Nursing leaders play a key role in creating a work environment conducive to professional development, recognition, and mutual respect, which is especially important in multigenerational teams [31].

In summary, effective management of nursing staff in healthcare facilities requires a flexible approach that accounts for generational diversity. Communication, building a culture of mutual respect, and investing in professional development are crucial. With appropriate tools and strategies, it is possible to create a team that effectively achieves organizational goals while meeting the needs of each generation. Moreover, generational diversity in nursing teams should be seen as a potential that can be effectively utilized through appropriate management strategies. Investing in understanding and addressing the needs and expectations of different generations not only contributes to improving the quality of nursing care but also increases job satisfaction and team stability. Further research on generational differences and their impact on nursing team functioning may provide valuable insights to improve management practices and meet the challenges of the modern healthcare system.

Limitations and future directions

This study is based on a narrative literature review, which may involve selection bias due to the subjective inclusion of sources. Although only two databases were searched (PubMed and Google Scholar), the search was limited to publications available in English and Polish, which may have excluded relevant studies in other languages. Additionally, the focus on generational characteristics and strategies was largely derived from secondary sources, without original empirical research conducted by the authors.

Future research should focus on empirical studies within specific healthcare institutions to assess the effectiveness of generational management strategies in real-world nursing environments. Comparative analyses across countries or healthcare systems may also offer valuable insights into cultural influences on generational dynamics. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could better capture evolving generational trends and their impact on team performance, job satisfaction, and retention among nursing staff.

Conclusions and recommendations

Managing generational diversity in nursing teams requires a flexible approach that takes into account the differing needs and expectations of each generation. Key elements include creating an inclusive work environment, effective communication, mentoring programs, and recognition and support from leaders. Integrating the knowledge of older employees with the technological skills of younger ones fosters the development of cohesive and efficient teams. Implementing strategies that promote intergenerational cooperation enhances the quality of care, staff satisfaction, and the overall effectiveness of the healthcare system.

Recommendations:

1. **Develop tailored communication strategies:** Adapt communication methods to suit different generational preferences – for example, combine face-to-face meetings with digital communication tools to engage all staff effectively.

2. **Establish mentoring and reverse mentoring programs:** Pair experienced nurses with younger staff to facilitate knowledge exchange, while encouraging younger nurses to share their technological skills and new practices.

3. **Provide ongoing training and professional development:** Offer training programs that address both clinical skills and technological competencies, ensuring all generations stay updated and confident in their roles.

4. **Promote flexible work arrangements:** Recognize diverse work-life balance needs by introducing flexible scheduling, part-time options, or job-sharing where possible.

5. **Encourage leadership to recognize generational contributions:** Leaders should actively acknowledge the unique strengths of each generation, fostering respect and motivation across the team.

6. **Create inclusive policies and team-building activities:** Design policies that support diversity and inclusion, and organize intergenerational team-building exercises to strengthen collaboration and mutual understanding.

7. **Monitor and evaluate outcomes:** Regularly assess the impact of these strategies on team dynamics, staff satisfaction, and patient care quality to refine and improve approaches.

Implementing these recommendations can help healthcare organizations build resilient, adaptive, and high-performing nursing teams capable of meeting evolving patient needs.

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Corresponding author:
Elżbieta Szlenk-Czyczerska
Email: ela6035@onet.pl
Institute of Health Sciences
University of Opole
Katowicka 68 Street
45-060 Opole, Poland

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