



Health professionals serving individuals with developmental disabilities: Association between leadership behaviors and practice

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Healthy People 2020 highlights the promotion of health and well-being of all people including those with disabilities. The current study measured the association between transformational leadership behaviors and health promotion practices for Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) network professionals serving individuals with developmental disabilities. Transformational leadership is characterized by influential behaviors and attributes, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, (Bass and Avolio, 2004).

Why is leadership important? Firestone (2009) views the health care system as one that is constantly changing and embedded in an economy of uncertainty. Health professionals in academia are responsible for reshaping their organizations to adapt to the environmental changes (Firestone, 2009). A similar analogy can be made with health professionals within provider health systems.

Using a web-based survey design to collect data, multivariate analysis was performed on the variables. Respondents included 222 professionals with a mean age of 47.9 years (e.g., nutritionists, occupational and physical therapists, speech pathologists, social workers, physicians/nurse practitioners, and nurses) from across the United States. Transformational leadership behaviors of AUCD professionals were associated with health promotion practices for cardiovascular fitness ($p=.003$). Transformational leadership behaviors presented a trend association with practices that promoted healthy weight ($p=.07$). In conclusion, the more transformational leadership attributes a clinician possessed, the greater their health promotion practice scores. The results of this study suggest that training of professionals treating individuals with disabilities should emphasize building characteristics congruent with transformational leadership. While *Healthy People 2020* supports social and physical factors as determinants that influence the health of people with disabilities, leadership behaviors may prove to be a determinant of health that is not only associated with health promotion practices of specialty professionals but also contributes to the health status for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Learning Objectives:

1. Define transformational leadership behaviors.
2. Discuss leadership as a possible determinant of health.
3. Explain how leadership behaviors and practices can impact health status for individuals with developmental disabilities.

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