OBJECTIVE   The purpose of this research was to investigate how participating
                       in an online learning community would impact nurse educators'
                       levels of leadership.

METHODOLOGY

A nonrandom sample of nurse educators within three Canadian provincial registered
nursing licensing bodies participated, with 19 in a facilitated learning group and 16 in a
self-facilitated learning group, both within an online 12-week leadership program. The
Leadership Practices Inventory was completed as both a pre- and post-test assessment,
with strong internal reliability coefficients: Model (.75 pre/.81 post), Inspire (.90/.94),
Challenge (.81/.88), Enable (.74/.74), and Encourage (.79/.85). The Community of
Inquiry Instrument (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000) was used to measure teaching,
cognitive, and social presence. The typical participant was female and ranged in age
from 30-34 years to 60-64 years of age, with a bachelor's degree, and with work
experience in both urban and rural hospital settings.

KEY FINDINGS

The rank order of the leadership practices was the same at the start and the end of the
program, with Enable being the most frequent practice, followed by Encourage, then
Model and Challenge, and then Inspire. No significant differences were found between
the two groups; however there was a significant difference within the groups over time
with all five leadership practices increasing after participation in the online community.
The online community was identified as having moderate to moderately high levels of
teaching, cognitive, and social presence, although there were no significant differences
between the two groups.

The authors conclude: "The fact that all five leadership practices improved provides
supportive evidence that hospital-based nurse educators could develop their own
leadership practices in an online learning community that incorporated a library of
resources including narrated presentations related to each of the five exemplary
leadership practices, a growing list of leadership resources such as Web sites, articles,
and other leadership activities shared by the educators themselves, and the use of
storytelling where educators reflected on their own leadership abilities and posted stories
representative of their own leadership practices" (pp. 45-46).

The authors further noted: "Online storytelling can be an effective teaching-leaning strategy, as the stories told by the nurse educator were very powerful, and through their stories, they were able not only to reveal their leadership practices, but also to transmit their own shared values and beliefs about nursing and nursing education. Given that all five exemplary practices of leadership increased in both groups, evidence supports offering leadership development in an online environment" (p. 48).