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Age diversity management in healthcare: leveraging generational differences with an inclusive approach

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Abstract

This paper examines the growing generational diversity within the healthcare workforce and highlights the importance of leveraging these differences through an inclusive approach. As Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials coexist in the healthcare workforce, organizations face new challenges and opportunities. Each generation brings its own distinct values, expectations, and work attitudes that significantly impact team dynamics, stress management, job retention, and leadership preferences.

Through a comprehensive literature review, the study suggests effective strategies to address generational differences to promote collaboration and team cohesion. Particular attention is paid to the role of coordinators in identifying and applying tailored interventions, such as mentoring, reverse mentoring, shared leadership models, and tailored communication styles, that cater to the specific needs of each generation.

The paper emphasizes the relevance of recognizing age-related diversity as an asset to create resilient, adaptable, and high-performing teams. By adopting age diversity management practices, healthcare organizations can better appreciate individual contributions and encourage an environment of mutual respect and learning. Ultimately, the study states that inclusive and flexible leadership can improve staff satisfaction and the quality of patient care in a rapidly evolving healthcare landscape.

Introduction
Currently, the healthcare sector is experiencing a pivotal moment in which pension reforms and measures to contain public spending are leading to an increase in the average age of its workforce. Alongside a significant presence of more experienced staff, there is also a considerable proportion of younger workers. As working life progressively extends, the generational gap within healthcare teams is widening at an accelerating rate.

This growing generational diversity must therefore be carefully considered by organizations, particularly by those responsible for human resources and team coordination. An integrated, inclusive, and tailored approach represents not only an innovative organizational strategy but also a forward-thinking one. Its goal is to minimize generational conflict while enhancing and maximizing the unique value of human capital.

The theory of generations
In order to understand the main challenges and possible strategies to reduce generational conflicts in the workplace, it is necessary to refer to the concept of a generation. A generation can be defined as a group of individuals within a similar age range, born during the same historical and cultural period, who have shared formative experiences while coming of age.[1] This gives rise to the theory that significant shared life experiences can create cohesion in perspectives and attitudes, shaping distinct values and workforce models from one generation to the next.[2] Today, it is possible to identify as many as five generations coexisting and interacting within professional environments. These include the Veterans, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, the Millennials, and Generation Z.

In the context of this study, particular focus is given to the Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials. The Veterans are largely retired, while Generation Z,[3] although of increasing interest, is still only beginning to enter the workforce. Despite the need to understand its traits and characteristics, the current literature offers a limited number of studies on this generation.

Baby Boomers
This generation comprises those born between 1946 and 1964. The name derives from the "baby boom" period, characterized by a significant increase in birth rates during these two decades. Generally, Baby Boomers grew up in families with an authoritarian figure, the father, and a mother who took care of the home and family. They appreciate direct communication and prefer, as well as feel reassured by, environments where roles are clearly defined.

Their work ethic is strong and deeply rooted, with work seen as a source of self-esteem and social recognition. They are often portrayed as work centric. While not naturally familiar with technology, Baby Boomers are gradually adapting to modern communication methods. They tend to embrace change, particularly when it is supported and encouraged within the workplace.[4,5]

Generation X
This generation includes those born between 1965 and 1980. Individuals belonging to Generation X were predominantly raised in families where both parents worked and were career-oriented, often resulting in them spending more time alone and receiving less emotional nurturing compared to other generations. They are commonly described as skeptical and generally less inclined to share knowledge or actively participate within workgroups. Unlike older generations, Generation X marks the beginning of the shift in which work is no longer the central axis around which life revolves.

Generation X workers are practical and pragmatic, valuing independence. They feel comfortable managing their work and related activities autonomously. Members of this generation can be regarded as

excellent problem solvers. Compared to other generations, they tend to be less loyal to their leaders and institutions.[1,3]

Millennials
Also known as Generation Y, they are the generation born to the Baby Boomers. They were born between 1981 and 1995. Millennials are intuitive, communicative, and ambitious. They grew up in families characterized by cooperation and communication among members. They are sociable and have a strong team-oriented mindset. At the same time, they often struggle when required to make decisions independently or take clear positions.[1] They value community but are selective in their relationships. They need constant stimulation, which applies both to their private lives and to their work. Values and ethics are crucial aspects that largely guide their work choices. Millennials see work as a means to maintain their expected lifestyle, attributing to it a primarily instrumental purpose. Regarding their relationship with supervisors, they seek close connections, continuous sharing, and regular feedback. They highly value open discussion and are attracted by career advancement.[3]

Context
Social inclusion within a context characterized by complexity and an intergenerational perspective represents a key starting point for studying and fully understanding the diversity that can exist within a single workgroup. Whereas in the past such groups were more homogeneous in terms of generation, today they are increasingly heterogeneous and diverse. This is certainly due to the growing presence of older workers in the labor market, alongside the progressive entry of younger generations and the continued presence of intermediate groups already part of healthcare organizations. In this scenario, the company must evolve into a social actor, with corporate welfare shaping the well-being system that every organization implements to provide its employees with the best possible conditions.[6]
From the perspective of multigenerational dynamics as a major change factor, it is clear and intuitive that the strategy to pursue wellbeing will be to create a balance between the different generations within the organization itself.[7]

Age diversity management
When talking about diversity management, reference is made to a philosophy integrated into human resource management systems, capable of addressing the differing needs, motivations, expectations, and attitudes of various types of people. It embraces a strategic and organizational approach that considers the individual as a fundamental resource for business success, aiming to treat each person differently in order to value and integrate their diversity and uniqueness, while simultaneously promoting organizational wellbeing and optimizing achievable results.[1]
Age management refers to the area concerned with integrating and valuing employees by considering each worker's chronological age. The objective is to create balance among different generations by adapting role-related activities and increasing the dynamism of an ageing workforce. The starting point is to analyze potential generational conflicts of interest. This initial step makes clear that the focus is not only on the ageing of a significant portion of workers, but rather on the growing diversity of the workforce as a whole.[1]
Since our organizations consist of human capital that naturally becomes increasingly diverse, variable, and unique, it is evident that a standardized approach differs greatly from a targeted and personalized approach. Over time, standardization would lead to employee dissatisfaction, difficulties, and conflicts, which would inevitably impact performance and the quality of service delivered. For coordinators

responsible for management within their organizations, it is therefore crucial to identify effective strategies for managing a multigenerational team.

Methods

A literature review was conducted between November 2024 and January 2025 by searching databases such as PubMed, CINAHL Complete, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The search included articles published from 2000 to 2024 to ensure a relevant number of studies on the topic of age management that were as up-to-date as possible. The methodology flow is summarized in Figure 1, and the keywords are reported in Table 1.

To make the search as focused as possible, articles not strictly related to Age Management were excluded, while all those addressing generational differences in healthcare settings were included. Particular attention was given to articles with implications for the role of coordinators in redefining organizations characterized by a generationally diverse workforce.

Results

From the research conducted, 25 articles published between 2000 and 2024 were included. The studies are summarized in Table 2. During the collection and grouping of results, several areas of interest were identified, focusing on the different approaches various generations have towards a range of topics, which will be outlined below. In the Results and Discussion sections, practical strategies available to coordinators for effectively managing a multigenerational workforce will be identified. Results are also summarized in Figure 2.

Generation comparison in stress management

It is assumed that nursing is inherently a high-stress profession, both because of the nature of the work itself and due to organizational issues, such as staff shortages, heavy workloads, and irregular shifts.[8] Organizationally, this leads to high absenteeism, low productivity, and intentions to leave the workplace. It is clear that voluntary turnover among health personnel has a knock-on effect on healthcare organizations and the patients themselves.[9]

Several studies have found that the factors increasing stress levels and the coping strategies used vary significantly between generations. Work overload and role ambiguity appear to be major sources of stress, particularly for Millennials and Generation X, while Baby Boomers report a greater use of self-controlled coping behaviors. A similar generational division emerges concerning work-life balance. For Baby Boomers, whose motto is 'work to live', an increase in responsibilities or workload represents a potential challenge and an opportunity for development and growth. Conversely, Generation X and Millennials tend to see work as a means to live rather than the other way around. While changing employers is rare among Boomers, for Millennials and Generation X, this inclination increases as they tend to move to other organizations if these generations do not find sufficient benefits or reasons to stay.[10]

For Baby Boomers, sudden changes and the widespread use of technology often cause discomfort and restlessness, especially when the organization does not provide adequate support or allow sufficient time, from the perspective of this generation, to adapt to changes and move forward confidently.

Another factor linked to increased professional stress among nurses is the lack of support from management and obstacles to career advancement. This mainly affects Millennials, for whom professional growth is a priority. Meanwhile, Millennials tend to show lower resilience but a higher level of group cohesion.[11,12] Despite Baby Boomers' apparent weakness with technology, within a multigenerational workforce, there is a clear mix: some members face difficulties (the Baby Boomers),

while others move with skill and ease in this area (the Millennials). These two generations, although in different ways, demonstrate a willingness and aptitude for teamwork.[3]

A practical and effective strategy to support and strengthen members of a workgroup, reduce stress levels, and foster cohesion and a sense of belonging is mentoring.

Mentoring

This is a professional development process where an experienced and competent professional (the mentor) provides guidance and support to a less experienced professional (the mentee) in the same field.[13] While process is more effective when carried out by an older professional mentoring a younger one, the reverse can also be true. Given that technological advances may leave some older nurses less proficient in certain evolving activities, this process can work the other way round through reverse mentoring. In this method, the mentor is the younger professional with strong digital skills, who supports their mentee, the older professional, fostering mutual learning and exchange of expertise.[14]

Generational factors influencing workforce retention

In this context, age proves to be particularly relevant in identifying the motivations that drive professionals to stay within the same organization. From a generational predisposition standpoint, it is observed that Baby Boomers tend to be more loyal and rarely consider changing jobs easily, whereas this is not the case for Generation X and Millennials.[15] Among the generations, Gen Xers are the most independent, autonomous, and less inclined to share knowledge. Generally, this generation is not particularly loyal to their employer in the practical sense: when they find a job that better meets their needs, they leave their current one without much hesitation, having developed a weaker sense of belonging. For Generation X, economic performance holds greater importance than for other generations.[3]

Millennials, who tend to change jobs if they feel dissatisfied, clearly know the conditions that can encourage their retention.[16] Among these are opportunities for career advancement, recognition, effective use of technology and a relaxed work environment with good relationships among colleagues.[17,18] Teamwork is especially appreciated by this generation, so creating and maintaining a cohesive and well-organized team is a key strength. Work-life balance is also fundamental. When Millennial health personnel find these characteristics in their workplace, they tend to respond with authenticity, humility, empowerment, dedication, a sense of belonging, and a strong intention to remain loyal to their organization and employer.[19,20]

Comparing leadership styles across generations

Baby Boomers grew professionally in a work environment dominated by a top-down approach. This generation internalized power management models that emphasize hierarchy, directive leadership, and centralized decision-making. This traditional view sees the leader as an authoritative and undisputed figure whose word is law and whose command is not to be challenged. The transition toward a collaborative leadership style, which values the contribution of each individual, promotes shared responsibility, and encourages active participation from the group, can therefore be disorienting and distant from the experience of those who have always operated under a clear command logic. The newer generations, partly Generation X but especially Millennials, are defined by an era of hyper-connection and a rapidly evolving global context in which their work aspirations are oriented toward a world of work that reflects values of equity, transparency, and sustainability. The use of social media in particular offers opportunities for connection and free personal expression but can also become a source of stress and ongoing negative comparison.[21]

It becomes clear that the coordinator must exercise leadership in a highly diversified way from a generational perspective, where the very conception and representation of leadership vary considerably based on age. It is essential to promote an approach that integrates technical and personal development, supporting the different generations not only in acquiring and consolidating technical and digital skills but also in strengthening relational and emotional abilities, particularly where younger generations face more difficulties. Investments in training, mentoring initiatives, and corporate policies focused on well-being can help prepare human capital for a future in which technology and human skills advance together toward personal growth, career progression, and sustainable innovation. Millennials emerge as the generation that places greater value on leadership quality compared to previous generations.[5,22] For the coordinator, it becomes fundamental to emphasize the importance of building bridges between different generations to best leverage the wealth of experiences and perspectives they can offer.[23] It is therefore understood that a shared, inclusive leadership model oriented toward a flexible approach, where dialogue and genuine understanding of the needs, limits, and expectations of team members prevail, represents a model capable of responding well to change and to the presence of a broadly diversified workforce.[2,24]

Discussion
As mentioned in the previous section, it is clear that coordinators must carefully consider generational differences. To do this effectively, it is important that they have an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of each cohort, exploring their preferences, strengths, and vulnerabilities in relation to the context in which they operate. This understanding allows for the optimal, productive, and efficient organization of teamwork.[25] As research has shown, supportive work environments are associated with better outcomes for both health personnel and patients. There are certain fundamental points that health staff consider essential, which the coordinator should take as a starting point when defining strategies to implement and strengthen a multigenerational work team.[26,27]

It is important that the leader guarantees adequate personnel and resources, gathers feedback from all generations present in the group regarding satisfaction levels about performance, work quality, and remuneration, encourages educational and mentoring opportunities, and identifies ways to improve interactions among staff members. The coordinator must focus on adopting comprehensive and clear communication strategies, recognizing personalized reward systems, and finding ways to ensure and offer workplace flexibility. The coordinator's efforts to consider factors such as fair and satisfactory remuneration for work performed, along with a genuine understanding by leadership of the diverse needs of team members, foster loyalty and gratification across all generations.[28]

Intervention strategies
Recognition of potential and protection of team interests
Creating favorable working conditions is largely the responsibility of the coordinator. Evidence shows that coordinators belonging to the Baby Boomer generation are the most involved and proactive in pursuing this requirement. Another aspect of this point concerns ensuring the development of the staff's potential. Specifically, there is interest across all generations in having opportunities for growth and participation in training and professional development activities. It is important for the coordinator to consider that among Millennials, there is a significant portion of professionals who, despite having less experience, have a strong predisposition and ambition to take on leadership roles in the near future.[29,30]

Effective resource allocation and building cohesive teams
There is a clear need to distribute resources in a balanced way, appropriately mixing professionals from different generations. When this careful approach is implemented, it can lead to a convergence of the

strengths of various workers, resulting in a continuous exchange of diverse skills and attitudes. These combined elements create structured and functional bonds.

Embracing change and promoting flexibility
Being aware that we are in a constantly evolving sector, and that not all generations respond with the same readiness and adaptability, it is the coordinator's responsibility to give all team members the necessary time to adapt and absorb change. To facilitate this process, integrating the knowledge and skills unique to each generation can help reduce difficulties related to the continuous changes inherent in the nursing profession.[29]

Meaningful recognition and feedback
Ongoing communication and frequent feedback particularly help Generation X and Millennials feel valued and foster a sense of belonging to their organization. The concept emerges that shared leadership represents the model best suited to meet the needs and mindset of the younger generations.[30]

Promoting active aging in the workplace
This specifically refers to the Baby Boomer generation. Physical and mental changes related to the normal aging process significantly impact work if not adequately considered. Some interventions that can support this group of workers and make their work appealing and satisfying include job rotation and internal mobility processes, continuous professional development, flexible work arrangements, and ensuring safety and ergonomics in the workplace.[1]

Conclusions
As highlighted by the studies examined in this paper, it can be affirmed that the presence of a multigenerational workforce represents both a challenge and an opportunity for healthcare organizations. It is a challenge because the complexity arising from the coexistence of different generations within the same organizational structure is a delicate and evolving reality that requires a well-structured and attentive management. This calls for a shift away from the standardized, depersonalized model that for years has characterized the organization of work in various sectors, including healthcare. However, it is also an opportunity because if organizations, and primarily the coordinator, choose to embrace diversity with openness and adopt an inclusive and personalized approach, numerous benefits can be achieved. These include promoting employee well-being while simultaneously improving the quality of care and organizational efficiency.

The human capital available to an organization is clearly a resource to be utilized in a targeted manner, taking into account the characteristics and needs that distinguish professionals at various stages of their working lives. The differences between generations are numerous, with each bringing its own particular strengths and vulnerabilities. The analysis has shown that age diversity management represents an effective and particularly suitable model in a historical period in which generational diversity is the norm. Age management aims to handle this diversity through an inclusive approach, applying strategies that enhance the strengths of each generation within an increasingly complex work environment.

The role of the coordinator is fundamental. There are strategies and lines of intervention that, if properly implemented, can reduce conflicts and address challenges related to generational differences. It is clear that age must be considered a fundamental factor when discussing personnel management and organizational structure. In light of the findings, Age Diversity Management emerges as a strategic approach capable of fostering the development of modern, competitive and future-ready teams and organizations.

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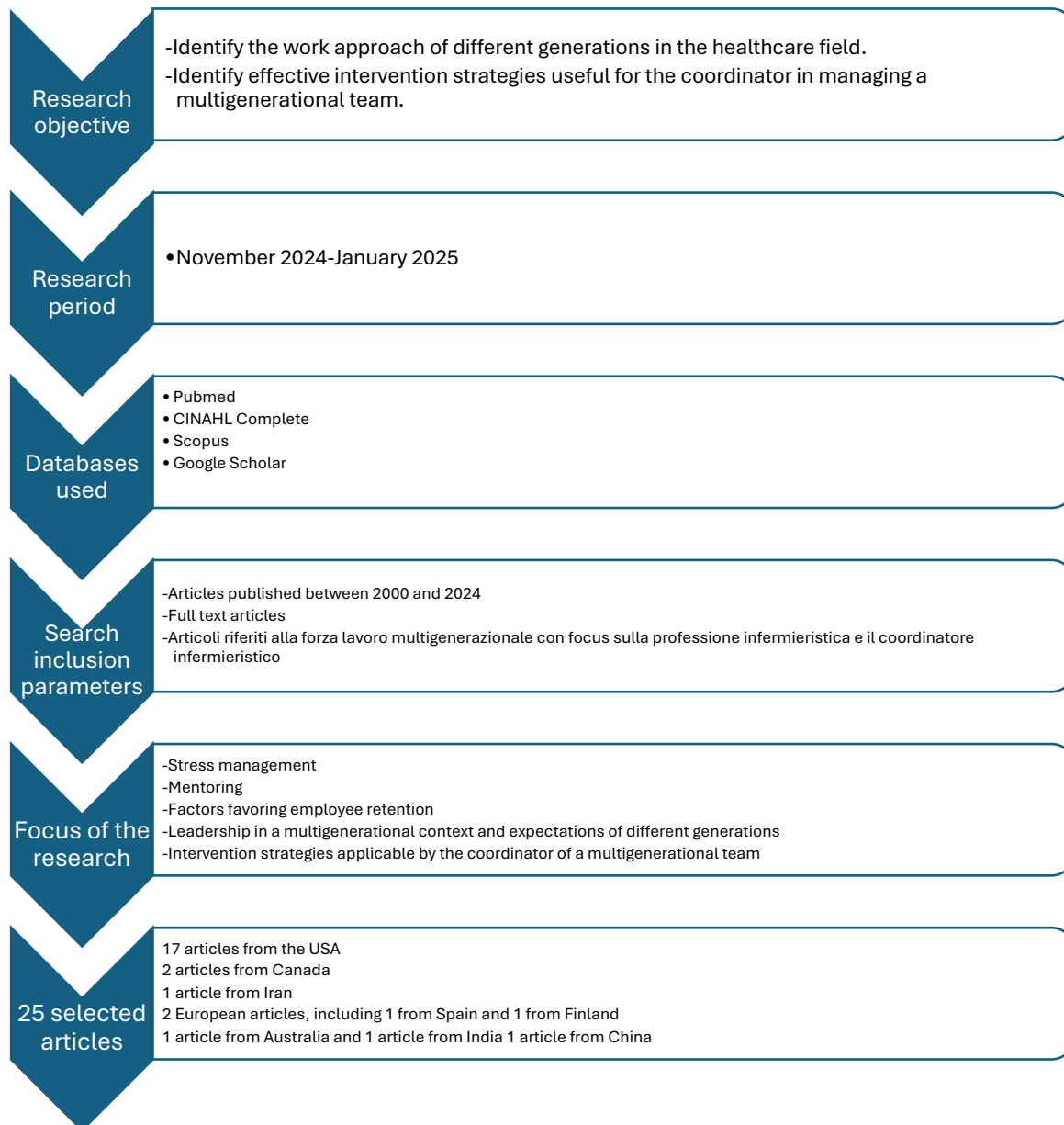30. Moyo MR. Adapting the nurse manager role to attract generation X and millennial nurses. Am J Nurs 2019;119:11.

Research objective
-Identify the work approach of different generations in the healthcare field.
-Identify effective intervention strategies useful for the coordinator in managing a multigenerational team.

Research period
•November 2024-January 2025

Databases used
• Pubmed
• CINAHL Complete
• Scopus
• Google Scholar

Search inclusion parameters
-Articles published between 2000 and 2024
-Full text articles
-Articoli riferiti alla forza lavoro multigenerazionale con focus sulla professione infermieristica e il coordinatore infermieristico

Focus of the research
-Stress management
-Mentoring
-Factors favoring employee retention
-Leadership in a multigenerational context and expectations of different generations
-Intervention strategies applicable by the coordinator of a multigenerational team

25 selected articles
17 articles from the USA
2 articles from Canada
1 article from Iran
2 European articles, including 1 from Spain and 1 from Finland
1 article from Australia and 1 article from India 1 article from China

Figure 1. Flowchart of the methodology.

Figure 2. Summary of results.

Table 1. Key words.

Intergenerational workforce, multigenerational workforce intergenerational team, intergenerational management
Age diversity management, diversity management
Generational gap, generational diversity, generational differences
Leadership, management, nurses, nursing
Generation y, millenials, generation x, boomers, generation z, builders, silent generation
Workforce, workplace, team, teamwork

Table 2. Review of academic studies.

Authors and country of origin	Title	Journal and publication year	Objective	Study typology
Rollan and Siles, Spain	Nusing professionals within the intergenerational context during the 20th and 21st centuries: an integrative review	Investigación y Educación en Enfermería (2021)	To analyze the influence that generational characteristics have had on the evolution of the nursing profession	Review
Thompson, USA	*Why work in perioperative nursing? Baby Boomers and Generation Xers tell all*	AORN Journal (2007)	Describe the factors that favor the choice and permanence of Boomers and Generation X nurses in the operating room work environment	Article/quantitative and qualitative study
Gabrielova and Buchko, USA	*Here comes generation Z: Millenials as managers*	Business Horizons (2021)	Describe the characteristics of generations Y and Z, illustrate the expectations of those generations with respect to leadership	Article
Knickman and Snell, USA	*The 2030 problem: caring for aging Baby Boomers*	Health Service Researce (2002)	Analysis of potential critical issues related to the aging of the population, with a forecast of the future scenario	Article
Mosadeghrad, Iran	*Occupational stress and turnover intention: implications for nursing management*	International Journal of Health Policy and Management (2013)	Analyze the stressors of the nursing profession and implications for business organizations	Article
Santos and Cox, USA	*Workplace adjustment and intergenerational differences between matures, boomers and xers*	Nursing Economic (2000)	Describe the main generational differences in relation to the world of work in healthcare	Article
Wakim, USA	*Occupational stressors, stress perception levels and coping styles of medical surgical RNs, a generational perspective*	Journal of Nurse Administration (2014)	Analysis of the stress perceived by nurses employed in surgical areas, and coping strategies messe in atto from different generations	Review
Widger *et al.*, Canada	*Generational differences in acute care nurses.*	Nurses Leadership (2007)	Describe the different approaches of nurses active in acute hospital wards	Article
Stevanin *et al.*, Finland	*Workplace-related generational charateristics of nurses: a mixed-method systematic review*	Journal of Advance Nursing (2018)	Describe the characteristics of generations of nurses in the workplace	Systematic review/mixed method
Coventry and Hays, Australia	*Nurse managers' perceptions of mentoring in the multigenerational workplace: a qualitative decriptive study*	Journal of Advance Nursing (2021)	Analyze and describe how mentoring is perceived and implemented as a tool for intergenerational exchange	Article/qualitative study
McClain *et al.*, USA	*Retention strategies and barriers for millenial nurses: a scoping reiew protocol*	JBI evidence synthesis (2021)	Analyzing Gen Y nurse retention strategies	Review

Waltz et al., USA	Exploring job satisfaction and workplace engagment in millenial nurses	Journal of Nursing Management (2020)	Analyze and report the level of satisfaction and commitment of Millennial nurses	Article/qualitative study
Anselmo-Witzel et al., USA	Are the generation Y nurses satisfied on the job? Understanding their lived experiences.	Journal of Nursing Administration (2017)	Identify the level of perceived dissatisfaction of Generation Y nurses	Article
Anselmo-Witzel et al., USA	Retaining generation Y nurses: preferred characteristics of their nurse managers	Journal of Nursing Management (2020)	Describe the perception and expectations of Millennial nurses with respect to their managers	Article/quantitative study
Armstrong et al., USA	Contemporary engagement strategies for nurse leaders	Nurse Leader (2021)	Describe intervention strategies to promote nurses' engagement	Article
Dahl, USA	Strategies to effectively manage multigenerational teams.	Podiatry Management (2020)	Describe and propose strategies for managing a multigenerational workforce	Article
Faller and Gogek, USA	Break from the past: survey suggest modern leadership styles needed for millenial nurses	Nurse Leader (2019)	Analyze and describe the leadership preferences of different generations	Article
Cabral et al., USA	Leading and retaining a multigenerational nursing workforce: leadership grunded in caring science	International Journal for Human Caring (2016)	Suggest and provide guidance and possible solutions to coordinate a multigenerational team	Review
Price et al., Canada	The intergenerational impact of management relation on nurse career satisfaction and patient care	Journal of Nursing Administration (2018)	Deepen and provide useful indications for the management of nurses at various stages of their careers and analyze the satisfaction of the latter	Article/qualitative study
Bhayana et al., India	The role of shared leadership in managing conflicts in multigenerational teams: a research framework.	Business Perspective and Research (2021)	Examine shared leadership in multigenerational teams and describe its potential	Article/conceptual framework
Campbell, USA	Generational preferences in the nursing work environmen: a dimensional concept analysis	Journal of Nursing Management (2020)	Analyze and identify the characteristics of work environments favorable for the various generations	Review
Christenses et al., USA	Can I relate? A review and guide for nurse managers in leading generatios	Journal of Nursing Management (2018)	Provide multigenerational team management strategies based on the characteristics of individual generations	Review
Dols et al., USA	Cultural and generational considerations in RN retention	Journal of Nursing Administration (2019)	Identify and provide guidance on generational and cultural factors that promote nurse retention	Article
Wong et al., China	Multi-genetarional perspectives on the competences requied of first line nurse managers: a phenomenological study	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (2022)	Provide guidance about nurses' preferences for leadership positions and clarify multigenerational perspectives	Article/Phenomenological study
Moyo, USA	Adapting the nurse manager role to attract generation X and Millenial nurses	American Journal of Nursing (2019)	Identify strategies to attract and retain a multigenerational workforce	Editorial