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From the Editor



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Where have all the nurse researchers gone?

It is the beginning of another semester and I want to share some thoughts about doctoral studies in nursing, particularly with a focus on geriatrics. I had the opportunity at the 2018 Gerontological Society of Aging conference to share these thoughts with the Nurses Special Interest group (if you were not there. ...consider attending next year as we missed you!). I asked them, and will ask you, where have all the nurse researchers gone, particularly those focused on care of older adults? Doctorally prepared nurse researchers are dropping in numbers at a time where there are so many questions to answer about care of older adults. For example, we have little evidence about how to care for those with cognitive impairment with treatments from reality orientation to technological approaches explored but not strongly supported.¹ What is happening to our pipeline and what can we do to build geriatric nursing knowledge?

What is the status of enrollment in doctoral programs?

In October of 2004, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing voted to endorse the Position Statement on the Practice Doctorate in Nursing. This resulted in a transition so that entry level of advanced practice nursing would be at the doctoral level by 2015. Schools of nursing embraced this and an ever growing number of schools now offer the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) as part of the training for becoming an advanced practice nurse. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) reported that the number of DNP programs across the country was 289 in April 2016 and there were almost 22,000 graduates from those programs.² Enrollment for DNP programs has grown from just over 3400 in 2008 to over 29,000 in 2017 and the number of graduates increased from 361 in 2008 to 6,090 in 2017. Conversely, PhD enrollment has been relatively flat since 2008 moving from just over 3,900 in 2008 to just over 4,600 in 2017 with the number of graduates moving from 555 in 2008 to 796 in 2017.

Although there is ongoing consideration and evaluation of the impact of this large number of DNPs, additional education is a good

thing and I anticipate and hope that these individuals will make an impact on quality of care across all settings. That being said, these are not research degrees and the focus of these programs is not on helping to establish new knowledge in nursing. What is important to recognize with these degrees is that they are entry level for advanced practice but they are not terminal degrees.

Challenges to bringing in the next generation of geriatric nurse researchers

First engaging in doctoral studies is not easy when trying to balance an ongoing nursing career, family, and other personal issues. It requires some level of passion and commitment that needs to be ignited either from within or from a mentor or colleague. Funding may be one of the challenges and this is exacerbated by the fact that if funded through many of the state or Federal programs as a research assistant the student may not be able to supplement his or her income with additional work hours. The stipends are much less than students can make if they work as either advanced practice nurses or floor nurses in acute and possibly even long term care settings. Time is a challenge, particularly when trying to balance work hours with school work and family commitments. Programs are increasingly going online and trying to make it easier for working individuals to attend classes at times that are convenient for them. That being said, the most successful doctoral graduates are those that work as research assistants during their programs and spend less time working as nurses, and those who participate in classroom based programs versus online education.³

For those who have Research/PhD degrees

For the small number of nurses who do obtain PhDs and are trained in research, all too few are engaging in research activities. The challenges to participating in research vary for each individual but include the difficulty in obtaining funding whether this is



government funding from the National Institutes of Health or from smaller funding opportunities through foundations. Of course, if you don't submit you never get funded and this, I believe, is the biggest challenge: Never trying or not continuing to try. Marie Bernard from the National Institute of Aging confirmed yet again at the Gerontological Society of America meeting that it is those who are persistent and revise and resubmit their grants that have the most success with funding.

Insufficient time is more likely an excuse rather than a challenge but we can call it a challenge given that grant writing can't be completed during a 40 h work week. To truly engage in writing a grant, or a manuscript for that matter, a sufficient amount of time needs to be set aside to stay focused on this work and not have to restart it and refocus every time you get a free hour. Scheduling time and planning are necessary and doable to get the writing done. Another major challenge to engaging doctorally prepared geriatric nurses in research is the lack of mentors and lack of team. Good mentors are hard to find as are good teams. It takes investment on the part of the new researcher to develop a mentoring relationship and a strong research team.

There are several other challenges which make research unpleasant, frustrating and something one may not want to endure. These include managing Institutional Review Board requirements and funder requirements such as annual reports; recruiting settings and participants in aging facilities or the community; staffing for research positions and turnover; managing research activities with limited budgets; and the expectations that once funded you will stay that way.

Solving the problem

One thing that we can do to help increase the numbers of individuals interested in pursuing research degrees and engaging specifically in aging research is to remind all of our DNP students with a focus on adult health that the DNP is not a terminal degree. Encourage those who may have identified (and been discouraged from pursuing) research questions for their DNP project to apply to the PhD program and return for a research degree. We need to advocate for funding for nurse PhD students that allows individuals to continue to work as nurses to augment their stipends which, as noted, are often not sufficient for a single individual let alone a family. Lastly, we need to be

flexible in the accessibility of our programs in terms of timing of classes and continue to explore the pros and cons of online education.

For those that have PhDs but are not engaged in research we need to serve as mentors, be open to the ways in which an advanced practice nurse can combine teaching, research, and practice and provide role models who have done this, make resources accessible that can help facilitate completion of regulatory requirements and grant submissions, and help these individuals set priorities and schedule time to make research happen. Lastly, we need to acknowledge that in nursing we are often balancing research with practice and teaching if in an academic setting. This work load needs to be recognized and acknowledged verbally and through financial incentives.

Now is the time for aging research to happen with the ever increasing number of older adults internationally and the increased opportunities for aging research related resources. For fiscal year 2018, Congress provided an additional \$414 million in Alzheimer's research funding at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). With this increase, along with previous research investments, the NIH is expected to spend \$1.9 billion on Alzheimer's research in 2018. Based on the targets outlined in the Bypass Budget, Congress should provide an additional \$425 million in Alzheimer's research funding in fiscal year 2019. Think about all those research questions that we have related to care of older adults and go out today and start working on a grant, encourage a student to enroll in a PhD program, and encourage a colleague to work on a research project that will help us move towards answering those questions.

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