Preparing nurses for faculty roles: The Institute for Faculty Recruitment, Retention and Mentoring (INFORM)

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1. Introduction

As the profession continues to face an expanding shortage of professional nurses, so too the number of faculty required to prepare students is critically inadequate to meet this need. Thus, nursing education programs need to develop ongoing plans of action to meet this challenge as the very viability of the profession is at stake. Faculty serve as the very foundation for nursing education. Without faculty there will be no "next generation" of nurse scientists, educators and clinicians. Further, Booth et al. (2016) point out that there is a lack of consensus regarding the preparation of nurse educators although the World Health Organization (2016) has identified core competencies for nurse educators. With the understanding that faculty are a critical, but scarce resource, strategies to recruit, mentor and retain nurse educators are essential to support stable, solid educational programs that prepare the future generation of professional nurses.

To address the multi-faceted challenges of development, recruitment, retention, and advancement of nurse faculty, we have developed a major initiative, the Institute for Nursing Faculty Recruitment, Retention and Mentoring (INFORM). This initiative focuses on increasing the number of faculty through innovative recruitment efforts and engaging, mentoring, developing and advancing faculty to provide a firm foundation for our educational mission. INFORM also supports efforts to eliminate the perspective divide between research and clinical faculty, and build a common approach to scholarship and citizenship.

2. Background

The registered nursing (RN) workforce is expected to grow by 16% between 2014 and 2024, making nursing the fastest growing profession in the U.S. but yet is not expected to meet growing workforce needs. The expected need for RNs reflects the increased emphasis on preventive care, the increase in chronic conditions such as diabetes and obesity, and longer life-spans (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Analytic models, however, have predicted dire shortages of RNs in the United States over the next two decades with New England, central

southern and northern western states being most vulnerable, largely due to the aging RN population, and retirement of nurses, of whom 45% are over age 50 in New England (Auerbach et al., 2017). The nursing profession is now acutely aware of the impending "silver tsunami" that will impact nurse educators. Recent data indicate that 60% of nurse educators are over age 50 and 20% of these faculty are over 60 years of age (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), 2013). Thus, the numbers of current nurse educators eligible for retirement in the near future is large. Concerns are justified that a wealth of knowledge and expertise possessed by experienced nurses that will be lost with this generation of RNs that could potentially place patient safety at risk (Buerhaus et al., 2009). In the United Kingdom, new nurses are failing to compensate for the "hole in the bucket" with vacancy rates reported from 9.4% to as high as 30% (Imison, 2016). Further complicating matters is the globalization of the nursing where qualified nurses may move among English speaking countries including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia, and New Zealand (Hawthorne, 2001).

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) released the results of a 2016 nurse faculty vacancy survey that showed a 7.9% faculty vacancy rate, with 1567 faculty vacancies identified in 821 schools of nursing. The majority (92.8%) of faculty positions required a doctoral degree (AACN, 2016). In addition to the aging of the RN and nurse educator workforce, another challenge in providing sufficient numbers of nurses is access to education. American Association for College of Nurses reported that in 2016, over 64,000 qualified applicants were turned away from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs (2016). Over two-thirds of schools and colleges of nursing listed the shortage of nurse educators as the primary reason these students were not accepted in their nursing programs (Fang and Li, 2013). The most critical issues faced by schools and colleges of nursing when trying to recruit faculty were: (a) the limited pool of doctorally-prepared nurses, and (b) noncompetitive salaries. The pool for future nurse educator faculty is limited, in part, because compared to other professions, nursing has an extended time to preparation for completion of the

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doctoral degree (Cleary et al., 2009). This further "tightens the pipeline" of potential faculty candidates. Faculty shortage is further compounded by a growing number of other employment options available for nurses within clinical settings and industry with, oftentimes, significantly higher salaries.

Unfortunately, despite the urgent need, masters-prepared nurse educators often feel unable to pursue the doctoral education needed to advance in their careers due to faculty shortages that result in high workplace demands (Jackson et al., 2011). Additionally, only 32% of professional doctoral graduates (i.e. Doctor of Nursing Practice, DNP) plan to pursue an academic career (Fang and Bednash, 2017). There is a need for higher salaries, clinical practice opportunities, and mentoring for DNP-prepared nurse educators in order to increase recruitment and retention among this group in academia. PhD-prepared nurse educators generate research, and provide the scientific base for the profession which significantly impacts patient care, quality, and cost (Nicholes and Dyer, 2012). Without adequate numbers of PhD-prepared nurse educators, there are few who can mentor students preparing to become the next generation of faculty and nurse scientists (Lally, 2012). Schools also identified budget constraints, the growing number of current faculty retirements, and candidates with limited teaching and/or clinical experiences as major factors impacting their ability to educate the next generation of nurses (Fang and Li, 2013).

Faculty shortages often require schools of nursing to recruit clinicians and researchers who are expert clinicians and investigators but who often lack knowledge and skill related to teaching and are thus relatively unprepared for the demands of clinical or didactic education, which can ultimately impact retention of these faculty (Hewitt and Lewallen, 2010; Peters et al., 2011). Without development and support for those transitioning to these new roles, retention may be jeopardized if new faculty are left to "sink or swim." In a mid-western state university, establishing a mentoring program that specifically addressed the need for experienced clinicians and researchers new to the nurse educator role to enhance their evidence-based teaching skills improved retention of the faculty (Slimmer, 2012).

The recruitment and retention of nurse educators is influenced by a number of factors that include opportunities for professional development, competitive salaries, collaborative working environments, and recognition of faculty efforts and successes (Brady, 2010; AACN, 2016). In a national survey that included over 2000 nurse educators, the two leading factors cited for interest in the field was the opportunity to work with students, and the ability to help shape the nursing profession (Evans, 2013). Although, the vast majority of these participants believed that offering competitive salaries was the most effective strategy for recruiting additional nurse educators, a positive work environment that fostered collegial relationships and flexibility were identified as key factors in retaining nurse educator faculty. Similarly, in another survey of nurse educators, respondents reported that two of the principal barriers to high job satisfaction were lack of professional development opportunities and collegial relationships (Bittner and O'Connor, 2012). In a study examining impact of professional collegiality on mentorship, commitment of nurse educators to their role correlated positively with supportive, effective, mentoring relationships with their colleagues (Gwyn, 2011). Effective mentorship has been identified as crucial in retaining clinical nurse faculty and ensuring job satisfaction (Chung et al., 2010). Doctoral programs are becoming more accessible across the United States with 130 research focused (PhD) programs and 248 professional or practice focused (DNP) programs many of which offer online or hybrid options reducing this barrier to faculty preparation. The ability to raise salaries is a complex issue during this time of constrained resources including decreases in government support for education, minimal increases in tuition, and increasing competition for grant funding. Therefore, this initiative focuses on the remaining barrier to recruiting and retaining faculty – supporting and mentoring faculty to increase job satisfaction and success in the academy.

In order to improve nurse educator recruitment and retention,

professional development and mentoring programs have been initiated at various institutions (Gerolamo et al., 2017; Heinrich and Oberleitner, 2012; Martin and Hodge, 2011; Proto, 2009; Slimmer, 2012). A New Jersey program partnered with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to implement the *New Jersey Nursing Initiative Faculty Preparation Program* for doctoral students. This initiative provided doctoral students with financial support, integration into the faculty role, and education coursework for graduates who maintain a career as a nurse educator for up to three years after program completion. Findings of this initiative included the need for a defined plan, specified qualifications for employment as a nurse educator, and advanced clinical training (Gerolamo et al., 2017). Success in recruitment and retention was demonstrated by the University of Louisiana's Program of Nursing Teacher-Scholar Project which grouped master's-prepared nurse educators with those who had professional or doctoral degrees into peer-mentoring communities (Heinrich and Oberleitner, 2012). Outcomes from the project showed enhanced scholarly output, greater job satisfaction, and increased success with promotion and tenure, and the program met 100% of its recruitment goals.

Work-life balance has become an increasingly important topic in both the lay and professional literature. Women are more likely than men to leave faculty positions due to work-life balance issues, particularly in regards to maternity leave and child-rearing issues (Gardner, 2013; Westring et al., 2012). In a study of women who resigned tenure-earning faculty positions at a research university lack of infrastructure to support the institutions' expectations was cited as a key reason for their departure (Gardner, 2013). More recently, a study by Owens (2017) concluded that excessive workload due to a faculty shortage will continue to plague the profession until salaries, and consequently, the numbers of nurse educators rise.

Disruptions in the work-life balance of nurse educators frequently arises from dissatisfaction with workload, and continues to contribute to the overall faculty shortage (Owens, 2017) Personal values and how they are reflected in work practice significantly impacts retention of nurse educators (Cash et al., 2009). Faculty who are required to produce work that conflicts with their core values and interests often become discouraged (Banks, 2012), therefore, helping faculty to balance professional and personal goals is another important component of INFORM.

3. Program components

There are four key components to INFORM: academic citizenship, open-forum scientific discourse, evidence base for educational practice, and writing for publication. The *academic citizenship* series of seminars is designed to meet the needs of faculty during their first two years. It includes topics such as balancing responsibility to the three missions (teaching, research/scholarship, and service), setting goals (5-year, 3-year, semester, month, week, day), presenting yourself and promoting your work, presenting the college, academic politics, avoiding career limiting moves, and happiness at work (Clark and Sousa, 2018). Key outcomes of academic citizenship are to developing an acceptable work-life balance, identifying a network of mentors, and implementing a professional development plan.

The *open-forum scientific discourse sessions* provide the opportunity for junior and senior scientists to develop ideas, frameworks, and to seek input an feedback on proposed methods and analytic plans. These sessions include both planned discussions as well as open floor opportunities. These sessions allow for discussants from other disciplines (such as aging studies, engineering, entrepreneurship/business, and public health) to participate and provide a broad perspective. This series provides nurses new to the academy the opportunity to see that scholarship is a team activity and how it is conceived and done.

Writing for publication is essential since publications are the currency of the academy. Publications are necessary for obtaining grant funding and for promotion/tenure. We provide support for writing in many

forms including writing circles, writing groups, writing retreats, and a writing your journal article in 12 weeks seminar series (Belcher, 2009). Each of these approaches provides faculty with opportunities to gather with peers for encouragement, a sense of community, and sharing experiences as well as a structured or protected time to focus on writing.

The *evidence base for educational practice* series includes topical seminars based on recent findings from cognitive sciences, education and psychology. We insist on being familiar with the evidence base for our clinical practice but do not often expect the same with our educational practice. A popular offering in this area is a seven week seminar series on how learning works based on the work of Ambrose et al. (2010).

4. Implementation and preliminary evaluation

The *academic citizenship* series is scheduled for 1 h monthly. Most new faculty attend regularly for 12–18 months in order to meet their transition needs. The *open-forum scientific discourse* sessions are scheduled for an hour each week. All research-focused faculty attend regularly while clinical/teaching faculty attend sporadically depending on the topic to be discussed. Support for *writing for publication* takes on many forms. Each has good participation. As many as 25 faculty have participated for the "Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks," while smaller numbers participate in the weekly writing circle and twice a semester day-long writing retreats. Many faculty report acceptance and publication of manuscripts that they worked on during these activities. In fact, one clinical/teaching faculty member who thought that she couldn't be successful in writing for publication has had several papers accepted including one published recently in a high impact journal. The *evidence base for educational practice* has had 20 faculty participate in the seven week seminar series. They found it so useful that they requested a monthly lunch time meeting to discuss with each other how they were using the principles. Further, participants started a monthly journal club about teaching and learning practices.

5. Discussion

Community and stakeholder involvement can be key in addressing these nursing faculty shortages (Proto, 2009). Innovative educators have collaborated with community partners to support RNs in acquiring their master's degrees in order to qualify as undergraduate nursing faculty either through financial grants or through mentoring or fostering support groups (Pullen Jr. et al., 2009). In a review of strategies throughout the nation to recruit and retain nursing faculty, several state-wide organizations developed initiatives that involves multiple stakeholders including hospitals, community members, and legislative bodies. For example, Oregon developed a formula that clearly delineated the return-on-investment of utilizing nursing students in hospitals to facilitate clinical placements, and corporate partners facilitated the development and distribution of learning resources to share with schools of nursing (Chau et al., 2017). Similarly, Utah and seven other collaborative states worked with legislators and hospitals to financially support efforts to hire more nursing faculty and, several states have obtained HRSA grants to use in hiring and retaining nurse faculty (Cleary et al., 2009; Proto, 2009).

With INFORM, we moved beyond standard orientation and start-up support for new nurse educators to building ongoing, consistent activities, and development opportunities for all faculty. These initiatives are identified within the calendar each semester. INFORM has also provided us a platform from which to expand the community's understanding of the profession's challenges in nurse educator recruitment and retention which impact student access and future workforce. Ultimately, we stressed the "trickle down" impact from faculty vacancies to the number of nursing students that can be admitted to the number of graduate nurses available to provide care. We pressed this message throughout the community in order to develop a base of

friends and donors who then recognized the critical link between INFORM and nursing educational programs' ability to meet the community's demand for nursing care. Donor support provides funds necessary to make personal copies of materials for various activities available to all faculty without cost to the participants such as the Ambrose et al. (2010) and Belcher (2009) books.

6. Conclusion

INFORM activities have been well-received by faculty. Not only have faculty participated in the various development and mentoring activities, they have also developed and managed related activities themselves. Preliminary success has been judged by the engagement of large numbers of faculty in activities and the increase in the number of scholarly publications especially among the clinical/teaching faculty. With moderate investment resources and effort of senior faculty, we have demonstrated opportunities to increase knowledge, skills, and productivity of early career faculty.

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