

# AONL Competencies Create a WIN

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A student nurse internship program was designed with the purpose of improving recruitment and supporting a registered nurse's transition into professional practice. During this program development, it was identified that current partnerships with local nursing colleges were not strong enough to support the program, nor were they strong enough to sustain meaningful recruitment efforts. The American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL) competency behaviors guided this program development and were valuable in strengthening academic relationships with the local nursing colleges. As a result, a nurse internship program was developed, recruitment efforts improved, and turnover rates decreased.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Employment Projections for 2014 to 2024 indicate that the registered nurse (RN) workforce is expected to grow by 16% from 2014 until 2024; this correlates to the RN workforce growing from 2.7 million in 2014 to 3.2 million in 2024.<sup>1</sup> It is also identified that more than 1 million RNs will be reaching the age of retirement in the next 10 to 25 years.<sup>1</sup> MercyOne Northeast Iowa (formerly Wheaton-Iowa) has 31% of their bedside nurses who will retire in the next 15 years (K. Marmie, personal communication, March 2018). It is estimated that the replacement cost for each nurse who leaves the organization either through retirement or attrition is more than \$50,000 per occurrence.<sup>2</sup> Given the current and projected nursing shortage, coupled with the impending retirement of baby boomer nurses, health care organizations are finding that they need to be highly competitive and creative in trying to identify methods to attract nursing graduates to join their work force.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this program development and evaluation project was to develop, introduce and market the Wheaton Intern Nursing program (WIN program) for nursing students who were in their last

semester of an ADN or BSN nursing program. This initiative was implemented on 5 of the med-surg nursing units located at MercyOne Waterloo Medical Center and MercyOne Cedar Falls Medical Center. The med-surg units were selected due to the desire to provide student nurse interns with a solid nursing foundation as they prepared to enter professional nursing practice. Objectives to evaluate the success of the program included: participation in the WIN program by the 3 local nursing colleges, decrease in open RN full-time equivalents (FTEs), and decrease in the days to fill open nursing positions for these respective nursing units.

A search of electronic databases (CINAHL, PubMed, Clinical Key) identified published studies. The search was restricted to English language papers that were published within the past 5 years. Key words that were utilized related to student nurse internship programs and those specifically utilizing Benner's *Novice to Expert* as the theoretical framework.<sup>4</sup> It was noted that although there is a large amount of information available on nurse internship programs, there is limited information available that demonstrates the use of Benner's theory.

The American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL) competencies were also used as a model to help guide in the development of this internship program. The AONL Competencies include: communication, knowledge, leadership, professionalism, and business skills. Three of these core competencies were heavily utilized. The AONL Competencies assisted in the evaluation of the current health care environment, they aided in the evaluation on the impact that a nurse residency may have financially to the organization, they guided the design and development of the internship program, and they provided a guide to aid in strengthening academic relationships.<sup>3</sup>

## KEY POINTS

- The AONL Competencies can be used as a guide for nursing leaders in program development at their respective organizations.
- A student nurse internship program was designed to support the registered nurse's transition to professional practice.
- Establishing a partnering relationship with local nursing colleges is crucial in nurse recruitment.

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## METHOD

### Participants

The nursing departments that were utilized for the WIN program were the 4 med-surg nursing units at MercyOne Waterloo Medical Center and the one med-surg Unit at MercyOne Cedar Falls Medical Center. MercyOne Waterloo Medical Center is a 344-licensed bed hospital. MercyOne Cedar Falls Health Care is a 120-licensed bed hospital. These med-surg units were selected because they all had vacant nursing positions, and they all offer the opportunity for a student to build on their clinical foundation knowledge.

All 3 of the local nursing colleges were invited to participate in this program. Eligible participants for the WIN program were either ADN or BSN students who were in their last semester of their respective nursing programs. It should be noted that 1 of the local nursing colleges has a very reputable BSN program; whereas the other 2 nursing colleges both produce a significant number of ADN students. All 3 of the nursing colleges received the same marketing initiatives and strategies related to the WIN program.

### Procedure

This project was deemed not human subjects research by both the Catholic Health Initiative's and the HawkIRB. The 3 AONL executive competency behaviors of communication and relationship building, knowledge of health care environment, and business skills and principles strategically guided this program development.

In the business and knowledge AONL Competency phases, literature related to student nurse internships was reviewed, baseline data were generated for open RN FTEs and the days to fill open positions were established, the Iowa Nurse Practice Act and nursing practice guidelines from the Iowa Board of Nursing were reviewed to aid in defining the role of the student nurse intern, a job description was created, financial data were evaluated, and a salary range commensurate to the role was determined based on a market analysis.<sup>5</sup> Benner's *From Novice to Expert* served as a theoretical guide in the design of the WIN program.<sup>4</sup> In the WIN model, student nurses were paired with licensed nurses and worked under their guidance and supervision. Once competency was established, the student nurse intern would gain some autonomy and be allowed to perform appropriately delegated tasks independently. By providing the student nurse intern with the appropriate tools and support, it was theorized that these measures would improve the student nurse's transition to professional practice. Another perk of the program was that the WIN student nurse would get preferential hiring upon graduation, provided they received a positive evaluation upon completion of the WIN program. Unlike other nurse intern programs that are

only available during summer months, the WIN program would continue throughout the course of the year. Going forward, it would also allow students who live outside of the geographical area to participate due to the availability of onsite housing that was created as part of this project.

In the communication phase, there was a concerted effort to elicit the support of our local nursing colleges. These efforts included: face-to-face site visits, a pre-semester luncheon with nursing faculty from the various nursing colleges, and participation on their respective advisory boards. Internally, WIN program support was gained with the respective med-surg nursing leaders, the human resources (HR) nurse recruiter, and the organization's senior leadership team. Physician leaders and our quality board was also apprised of the internship program. Marketing strategies were focused on nursing students in their last semester of either an ADN or BSN program. The marketing flyer was attached to food and beverage treats and was shared with the nursing students at both the end of the semester and upon returning to class when the semester resumed.

In addition, our HR nurse recruiter and myself made it a point to visit each of the local nursing colleges at least once per semester to touch base with the nursing faculty and to provide an unexpected treat for the students. We found that having frequent touch points and leaving a food item/treat with our recruiting information paid great dividends in keeping our organization in the forefront of the students.

## RESULTS

To determine whether an effective academic partnership occurred with the nursing college, there was monitoring of the applicants with the goal of having 2 of the 3 nursing colleges with student nurse interns participate in the WIN program. To determine whether the WIN program impacted recruitment, the number of open RN FTEs and the days to fill open RN positions were evaluated pre- and post implementation. These metrics helped to determine whether the WIN program achieved its stated objectives and also helped to guide in program modifications.

Initially, the WIN program did not have any applicants. This was due to several factors, one of which was that the actual strategic decision to delay the implementation of the WIN program due to the organization's transition to a new electronic medical record. We really wanted to maximize the program, and after careful review, we decided that the timing of this implementation did not lend itself well to onboarding WIN program participants. It was felt that bringing on a student during this transition would have caused more job dissatisfaction than benefit for a nursing student. By the time the electronic health record

**Table 1.** College Participation

College	# of Candidates
College A	6
College B	0
College C	0
Other	2

implementation was completed, it was very late in the semester and students were preoccupied with end of semester tasks and the impending holiday season.

We went back and re-evaluated the design, maintained relationships with the local nursing colleges, and continued to market the WIN program. Fortunately, this resulted in 8 applicants. The applicants were screened, and 6 candidates were interviewed. Four candidates were hired and onboarded. One of the units did not hire an intern. Although we had the candidates, none of them expressed an interest in that unit. We elected to hire for fit and not to hire just to fill the position. Thus far, all 4 of the candidates have graduated and successfully passed their NCLEX boards. All 4 of these RN candidates have been hired within our organization (100% retention of the nurse interns). Another positive that has been noted is that the orientation time to the RN role has been decreased,

**Table 2.** Open FTEs and Days to Fill

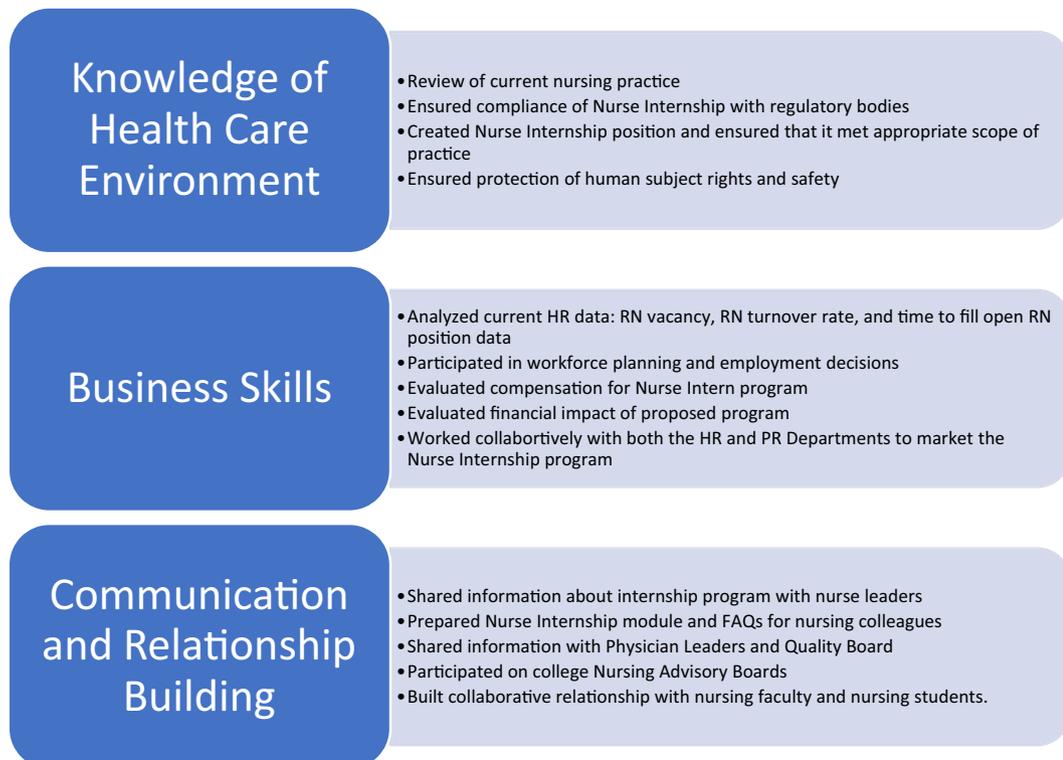
	Pre	Post
# of open Med Surg RN FTE's	17.1	13.5
Days to fill open RN positions	60	69.28

and this has been correlated with participation in the student nurse internship program.

These candidates are all from 1 local BSN nursing program. Although the goal was to engage 2 of 3 nursing colleges in the WIN program, this was considered a positive outcome because this nursing college is not one that we had successfully recruited from in the past, and they are well known for producing outstanding BSN graduates (*Table 1*).

Due to the limited implementation timeframe, no distinct correlation could be made regarding the WIN program's impact on the time to fill open positions. As a result, an ongoing evaluation will continue to take place to determine whether a correlation can be made regarding the days to fill open RN positions. However, there was a positive impact noted in the number of open med-surg RN FTEs (*Table 2*).<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, as we closed out 2018, we found that there was an overall decrease in the number of open RN positions within the organization. The organization began 2018 with 44 open RN positions, and we

**Figure 1.** AONL Competency Behaviors. PR, public relations.

ended 2018 with 31 open RN positions. We attribute this to the fact that we have built a stronger academic partnership with our local nursing colleges, and with the current nursing shortage, it is not impossible for a new RN to start in a specialty unit. In addition, an evaluation of our current RN turnover rate is showing improvement over this same time frame. In 2017, our RN turnover rate was 14.66%, and ending 2018, we had an RN turnover rate of 11.28% (L. Swanson, personal communication, December 2018). According to the Iowa Hospital Association, the state's RN turnover rate is currently 14.9% (S. Burt, personal communication, December 2018). The most recent Nursing Solutions, Inc report indicates a national turnover rate of 16.8%.<sup>6</sup> The improvement in turnover rates is felt to be 2-fold; we have established retention teams on some of our nursing units, and filling open RN positions has had a positive impact on staff morale in a time where other local nursing organizations are struggling to fill open nursing positions.

It should be noted that as partnering relationships were built with local nursing colleges, a barrier to utilizing our organization for clinical experiences from outlying nursing colleges was identified. Students were not able to participate in either clinicals or internships due to the burden of housing costs or the extensive commute. To maximize and prepare for future expansion of the internship program, the creation of student housing occurred so that our organization can accommodate nursing students from outlying nursing programs in our clinical settings. In the future, WIN program participants may be accepted from nursing colleges outside of our immediate geographical area. In addition, we implemented the use of digital recruitment by establishing virtual meetings. This allows us to complete WIN interviews with the aid of virtual technologies. In addition, social media has been used to pique an interest in future nursing colleagues. This included Live Streams via Facebook and a Welcome to Students presented by the chief nursing officer.

Figure 1 is a model summarizing how 3 of the key AONL Competency behaviors were utilized to aid in guiding the completion of this project.

## CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the WIN program resulted in building a strong partnering relationship with the local nursing colleges. The WIN program did predominantly attract student nurse interns from the 1 local BSN program. This is considered a positive result because historically, this organization has had very limited success in recruitment from this nursing college. In addition, other creative measures that may impact nurse recruitment did also occur. These included the development of student housing, the exploration of possible student nurse internships for other areas

(besides med-surg), the creation of digital recruitment, enhanced marketing to students, and the use of social media.

The evaluation of this program will continue on an ongoing basis because it may be too early to fully determine the effects of the program. A preliminary result indicates the actual number of open RN positions has decreased since the implementation of the student internship program. However, at this point, it is too early to tell whether the WIN program has impacted the days to fill open RN positions. In addition, the WIN participants will be monitored via a Casey Fink *Transition to Practice* survey to determine whether their transition to professional practice differs significantly from nursing graduates who did not participate in the WIN program.

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