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Nursing Simulation Fellowships: An Innovative Approach for Developing Simulation Leaders

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KEYWORDS

nursing fellowship;
simulation fellowship;
nursing simulation
fellowship;
fellowship curriculum,
simulation;
simulation leadership;
faculty development;
Watson's Human
Caring;
cognitive
apprenticeship;
Benner;
Dreyfus;
novice to expert;
Ericsson;
expertise acquisition;
deliberate practice;
debriefing

Abstract

Background: Increasingly, nurse educators with expert simulation knowledge and strong leadership skills are needed to lead simulation program implementation and faculty development efforts. The skills necessary for simulation leadership are not all innate but need to be developed and nurtured. Nursing simulation fellowships aimed at developing expert simulation knowledge and leadership skills can be a viable pathway for developing simulation leaders to fill these roles.

Method: We developed a one-year long immersive nursing fellowship as a solution to meet the challenge. The program's structure includes four overall objectives and seven modules with specific learning activities aimed at developing simulation expertise and leadership skills.

Result: In a one-year period, the nursing fellow targeted nursing quality and patient safety by developing and implementing sustainable simulation-based programs, faculty development programs, and scholarly projects.

Conclusion: Nursing simulation fellowships provide a longitudinal guided experience for simulation expertise and leadership skill development. This approach can be a viable solution to meet the growing challenges in implementing simulation programs. This article provides a case exemplar for an innovative approach to developing simulation nurse leaders. Supporting theoretical frameworks, curriculum structure, outcome measures, and challenges are discussed.

Cite this article:

Ng, G. M., & Ruppel, H. (2016, February). Nursing simulation fellowships: An innovative approach for developing simulation leaders. *Clinical Simulation in Nursing*, 12(2), 62-68. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecns.2015.11.005>.

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As simulation becomes more and more prevalent, nurse educators are increasingly recognizing the need for effective, high-quality simulation programs (Clapper, 2010; Cook et al., 2012, 2013). Effective simulation programs must include best practices, coupled with systematic faculty

development (Berkowitz, Peyre, & Johnson, 2011; Clapper, 2011; Hayden, Smiley, Alexander, Kardong-Edgren, & Jefferies, 2014, 2008; Jefferies et al., 2013; Jeffries, Dreifuerst, Kardong-Edgren, & Hayden, 2015; National League for Nursing, 2015; Nehring, Wexler, Hughes, & Greenwell, 2013). Currently, however, both program implementation and faculty development in

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simulation remain largely unsystematic (Adamson, 2010; Anderson, Bond, Holmes, & Cason, 2012; King, Moseley, Hindenlang, & Kuritz, 2008), with lack of standardized curriculum, administrative support, access to expertise, time, and familiarity with technology cited as barriers (Cheng et al., 2015; Jefferies, 2008; Jones & Hegge, 2008; King et al., 2008; Nehring et al., 2013). Viable solutions to overcome these barriers are urgently needed.

Key Points

- To meet the growing need for high-quality simulation programs, nursing simulation fellowships provide a model for preparing nurse educators to assume leadership positions in simulation programs and centers.
- The nursing simulation fellowship is grounded in several key theories and models, including Watson's Theory of Human Caring, cognitive apprenticeship, Benner's Novice to Expert, and Ericsson's Expert Performance and Deliberate Practice Model.
- The fellowship program's structure includes four overall objectives and specific modules with learning activities which help the fellow to meet the objectives and guide the fellowship director in assessment and outcome measurement.

Transformational leaders for simulation have been identified as a strategic solution to the program implementation and faculty development challenges (Conrad, Guhde, Brown, Chronister, & Ross-Alaolmolki, 2011; Jefferies, 2008; Leigh & Hurst, 2008; Nehring et al., 2013). A key role of the simulation leader is to create and implement a formal simulation faculty development plan for the institution (Jefferies, 2008; Nehring et al., 2013) and serve as a source of motivation and support for those hesitant to engage with simulation (Leigh & Hurst, 2008). An effective simulation leader needs expert simulation knowledge, as well as courage and skills, to advocate for the resources necessary for effective change. However, leaders with such comprehensive qualities may not be readily found but instead need to be nurtured and developed (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Currently, the ways to develop such leaders in

simulation remain unexplored and pose a complex challenge.

We identified nursing simulation fellowships as a strategy for developing transformational leaders. Over the last year, we implemented a one-year nursing simulation fellowship at a large simulation center. In this article, we will discuss the supporting theories, content, and outcome measures of our nursing simulation fellowship program.

Background

Currently, pathways for formal simulation leadership development for nurse educators are limited. Since 2010, the National League for Nursing has spearheaded leadership development efforts by offering a year-long Leadership Development Program for Simulation Educators. However, complex problems often require diverse solutions, and simulation fellowships may be considered as an additional option, warranting closer consideration.

Typically, a fellowship refers to an advanced training program in a specialty area (Hayden & Gordon, 2013), and a fellow may refer to "a person appointed to a position granting a stipend and allowing for advanced study or research" (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, n.d.). Although medical simulation fellowships have existed for approximately 10 years, as of this writing, to our knowledge, there have been no previous simulation fellowships exclusively for nurses (Hayden & Gordon, 2013; Kotal, Sivertson, Wolfe, Lammers, & Overton, 2015). Existing simulation fellowships also remain unstandardized; content, requirements, objectives, and participant qualifications have not been defined (Kotal et al., 2015). The lack of formalized definitions poses a challenge for those developing and managing simulation fellowships.

To design and implement a new nursing simulation fellowship, we operationally defined the fellowship as a 1-year, part-time funded program to develop transformational nursing leaders with expertise in the following key domains in simulation: technology, debriefing, course development, educational theory, faculty development, research, and leadership. The fellow works closely with the fellowship director, who is a simulation nurse leader accomplished in all the key domains and experienced in mentoring and professional development. With guidance, the fellow systematically implements at least one sustainable simulation program and participates in scholarly activities. The fellowship is both an expert apprenticeship and caring mentorship, grounded in nursing and learning theories.

Theoretical Frameworks

The underpinning nursing theory for this fellowship is Watson's Theory of Human Caring (Watson, 1979, 1985, 1999, 2007). Originally developed for patient care, Watson's theory has since been applied to nurse practice domains beyond the nurse-patient relationship to include the nurse educator-student relationship (Cook & Cullen, 2003; Sawatzky, Enns, Ashcroft, Davis, & Harder, 2009; Watson, 1999, 2007). Using Watson's theory as the ontological and philosophical foundation for the fellowship shifts the paradigm from a traditional skills training model to a caring, relational model. This is important because much of the teaching-learning activities in this fellowship

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