

Advanced Practice Nurse Fellowships: Creating Awareness, Creating Opportunities

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Very few specialty training programs are available for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), and those that do exist are underfunded. The fellowship model has been an effective educational venue for our physician colleagues. Medical fellowships are a time of training after residency when physicians hone their clinical and research skills within a particular area of specialization. Development of more nursing fellowship programs is an effective strategy to address the lack of specialty training and could advance APRNs' clinical and research skills.

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Within the parameters of their training, certification, and state regulations, APRNs may practice in ambulatory or inpatient settings and may focus on certain subspecialty areas such as cardiology or pulmonology. However, unlike our physician counterparts, formal training for these subspecialty positions is often limited. Some APRNs may achieve high levels of specialization by first working in an area as an RN for a number of years and then continuing in that area when they transition to an APRN role. Other APRNs may come new to a patient population and learn through a specialized orientation, or learn on the job. This "on the job" training as an RN or APRN, while a valuable experience,

does not replace formal education, training, and certification with that population and lacks the structure and breadth of a formal fellowship training program.

The purpose of this article is to describe a variety of APRN fellowships, including the Leadership Education in Adolescent Health (LEAH) Interprofessional Fellowship Training Program at Boston Children's Hospital, which two of the authors completed in 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. We will present an overview of available APRN fellowships, benefits and challenges of fellowships, and the potential role of fellowship training for APRNs in the changing state of health care.

APRN FELLOWSHIPS

Several fellowship programs have been created for new graduates of APRN programs. These fellowship programs are institution-specific and typically serve as a combination of orientation and specialty training. Established programs have been described in the emergency department (Varghese, Silvestri, & Lopez, 2012), perinatal care (Bradley & Spencer, 2011), and perioperative care (Graling & Rusynko, 2004; Sandhusen, Rusynko, & Wethington, 2004). These fellowships are usually found in large academic centers, but some opportunities may be found in community hospitals.

An interprofessional fellowship program inclusive of APRNs offered at Monell Chemical Senses Center in Pennsylvania included doctorally prepared nurses (not exclusively APRNs) in a research setting (Blank, 1993). In this program, Nurse Fellows conducted research collaboratively with fellows in biochemistry, physics, and other scientific disciplines. Although the resources available in this program were beneficial, and participants gained advanced research and grant-writing skills, there was no clinical care component.

The Neurovascular Education and Training in Stroke Management and Acute Reperfusion Therapy (NET SMART) fellowship (Alexandrov et al., 2009) prepares APRNs to provide neurovascular care and leadership. In this fellowship, academic content is standardized, and a supervising physician provides oversight of clinical training. Specific competencies such as interpretation of imaging studies and treatment of acute stroke are taught through video lectures and 80 hours of "clinical validation." Pre- and post-testing showed that both new and experienced APRNs demonstrated knowledge growth and improved clinical competency. After training, fellows increased their clinical responsibilities and reported benefits of the program, including clinical experience, performance feedback, and networking (Alexandrov et al., 2009).

In one health care system, research demonstrated the potential benefits of employer-offered APRN fellowship programs created to fill vacant positions in the operating rooms. The fellowship included classroom lectures, a skills lab, and precepting in the clinical

setting. A return on investment analysis conducted on this program demonstrated an improvement in recruitment and retention (Sandhusen, Rusynko, & Wethington, 2004). Nurse fellows who completed the program were asked to make a 2-year employment commitment in return for the financial investment allotted to fellowship training. Benefits of the fellowship included a core group of APRNs with specialty training in perioperative care.

The Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) fellowship program is funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB). LEND was initially developed in the 1950s to identify children with special health care needs. There are presently 43 LEND programs in 37 states (Association of University Centers on Disabilities, 2013). The fellowship is interprofessional and typically includes medicine, nursing, psychology, physical therapy, neurology, public health, social work, and other disciplines. The Nursing Trainee program is offered part time over 9 months, with lasting opportunities for networking and collaboration that continue after the fellowship has ended. The Nurse Fellow spends one day in clinical settings, as well as time on a core curriculum, research, and leadership activities.

A nursing leadership fellowship program has also been described for APRNs. The Postgraduate Nursing Fellowship was designed at one medical center to be an administrative fellowship, in which an APRN worked in conjunction with the chief nursing officer. This fellowship included projects geared toward the fellow's professional needs and interests and included project design and management (Mahaffey, Kaplan, & Triolo, 1998) to strengthen the APRN fellow's career.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Executive Nurse Fellows program is an advanced leadership program for nurses in senior executive roles. The goal is to support the advancement of nurse leaders in "health services, scientific and academic organizations, public health and community-based organizations or systems, and national professional, governmental and policy organizations" (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Executive Nurse Fellows, 2013). Twenty nurses are selected annually to participate in the 3-year fellowship, which requires a total of 4 weeks of full-time participation and distance learning; fellows may remain at their home institutions throughout the program. Participants do not need to be APRNs, although many of the Executive Nurse Fellows in the first three cohorts had masters or doctoral degrees in nursing or other fields. A survey conducted in 2010 sought to reveal the impact of the program on the 222 alumni. The respondents reported enhanced leadership skills, confidence, effectiveness, collaboration, public speaking, networking, policy development, and ability to effect change within one's institution. Additionally, themes emerged of improved career and academic prospects

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