

Mentorship in Developing Transformational Leaders to Advance Health Policy: Creating a Culture of Health

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Historically, mentoring in nursing has focused primarily on either moving novice nurses to a more advanced level of expertise in the clinical setting, assisting advanced practice nurses to reach professional excellence, or mentoring students and junior faculty researchers to expand evidence-based practice in nursing for colleges of nursing and nursing science. These efforts have achieved success at the individual and organizational



level; however, nursing has yet to achieve a “culture” of mentorship within the profession.¹⁻⁴ Nowhere is this gap more pronounced than in mentorship of future nurse leaders with the specific intent to develop the knowledge, skills, and political savvy to advance health policy and create better systems of care. The nursing profession is the largest segment of the nation’s healthcare workforce, yet nurses remain grossly underrepresented in major leadership positions within the healthcare system and within those organizations empowered to develop and implement health policy.^{5,6} In order to ensure that nurses are ready to assume these leadership roles, leadership development and mentoring programs need to be made available for nurses at all levels.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

In the United States, a total of 3.1 million nurses provide healthcare in a multisector delivery system that is stressed as it meets competing demands.⁷ Voted by the public as the most trusted and ethical profession by the Gallup Poll,⁸ nurses remain an untapped resource in leadership and policy positions in our healthcare system. By contrast, influential policy leaders

often view nurses as task oriented instead of as leaders able to provide a vision of the future.⁹ A study conducted by Dr. Lawrence Prybil⁶ reviewed 201 health systems (with a combined total of 2046 voting board members) and found that only 2.4% were nurses. A Robert Wood Johnson–sponsored investigation of a wide range of health organizations, including 10 organizations responsible for advancing the national quality

agenda, 10 of the largest healthcare organizations, and 10 non-nursing journals revealed that nurses represented only 2% to 4% of all voting board positions.¹⁰

By virtue of the demands and challenges arising through passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act¹¹ that ensures that all Americans have access to quality, affordable healthcare, our nation's nurses have received a mandate to actively participate in creating transformation within the healthcare system. There is a strategic need to create a new generation of transformational nurse leaders imbued with the knowledge and skills to advance health policy. According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report on the *Future of Nursing*,⁹ "In the health policy arena, nurses should participate in, and sometimes lead, decision making and be engaged in health care reform-related implementation efforts." The report calls for transformational nurse leaders to lead health policy, advance health equity, and redesign the US healthcare system.

In order to accomplish this charge and to "fulfill the promise we hold as a profession,"¹² nurses at every level and location must be prepared to lead, and to lead well. To accomplish this expansion of the number of nurse leaders, the IOM report⁹ endorses mentoring as a mechanism to develop leaders able to guide and create system changes via boardrooms, policy debates, and within communities. In order to set organizational vision and lead in turbulent times, the nurse leader must be strategically agile and political savvy to navigate health policy. This type of professional development indicates a need for mentors with specific leadership skills.^{13,14} As Goleman¹⁵ said, "Outstanding coaches and mentors get inside the heads of the people they are helping. They sense how to give effective feedback. They know when to push for better performance and when to hold back. In the way they motivate their protégés, they demonstrate empathy in action." However, the identification of experienced mentors possessing complex leadership skills to develop transformational nurse leaders remains unexplored. The use of mentors, as one strategy to create a new paradigm of nurse leaders, is supported by the IOM report,⁹ but the pathways for successful execution are not outlined in the report. Without further exploration on pathways to skillfully develop the emerging nurse leaders, the goals of the report risk being unachievable.

DESIGN AND METHODS

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Executive Nurse Fellows (ENF) Alumni Association provided a small seed grant to the New York Executive Nurse Fellows to host 2 northeast (NE) regional meetings in order to explore the willingness of experienced nurse leaders to serve as mentors. The group hosted several conference calls with ENF from New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania to help set specific aims for 2 meetings. The aims of the ENF NE meetings were to focus on the IOM recommendation 7 on transformational leadership in 3 areas: leadership development, mentorship, and engagement in health policy. The NE ENF would also remain steadfast in working on the

Campaign for the Future of Nursing with a specific focus on transformational leadership.

Meeting one: The first meeting was hosted in New York City at the Visiting Nurse Service of New York on May 18, 2012, with 27 participants. Using 2 interactive tools: Visual Explorer, a facilitation guide containing 108 images to support creative thinking and conversations to help problem solve, develop ideas, and new insights; and Leadership Metaphor Explorer, which consists of a card deck of 208 illustrated drawings and captions to provoke interactive discussion about leadership styles. Using Visual Explorer, participants were asked to answer 2 questions: "What brought you to your profession?" and "When you think about transformational leadership, what comes to mind?" Participants were given 5 minutes to share their responses using 2 of the images from Visual Explorer. The key arising themes were: importance of mentorship, leading by example, nurturing, respected profession, nurses work beyond the bedside, impact society and policy, courage to lead. In the second interactive exercise, using Leadership Metaphor, participants were asked to answer the following question: "How will the world look different as a result of our transformational leadership work?" Participants identified the following core themes: nursing's need to be creative, critical thinkers, connective partnership, and "A leader is a dealer in hope." The importance of mentorship was emphasized by participants to help lead by example, highlight nursing as a respected profession, develop the ability of protégés to move beyond the bedside, and understand nursing's impact on society and policy with the courage to lead.

The participants identified mentoring as a key priority area for supporting development of transformational leadership skills. In particular, participants acknowledged additional key themes: leadership skills cannot be reduced to textbooks or formal classroom learning, the learning is best acquired through observation and imitation, a role mentor plays while supporting the mentee's skill development.

Meeting two: The Phase 2 meeting hosted February 1, 2013, set out to build on the recommendations of the May 18th meeting by expanding collaboration beyond nursing and engaging organizations including the Future of Nursing Action Coalition committed to working to advance the 2010 IOM recommendations.⁹ These organizations had a commitment to use mentoring as an intervention to support emerging nurse leaders. The original stakeholder group was expanded to include membership organizations such as the Greater New York Nassau Suffolk Organization of Nurse Executives, Metro Action Coalition, Jonas Nurse Scholars, and NY Academy of Medicine Nurse Fellows. The NE ENF planning committee had identified partner collaboration as an essential ingredient for sustainability and scale-up for identifying mentors and engaging additional stakeholders. Attendance at the February 1st meeting included 60 leaders representing the states of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. The participants ranged from chief nursing officers, deans, directors, and faculty from schools of nursing, representing a plethora of

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