



Evaluation of a peer mentoring program for early career gerontological nursing faculty and its potential for application to other fields in nursing and health sciences

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ABSTRACT

Background: As the retirement rate of senior nursing faculty increases, the need to implement new models for providing mentorship to early career academics will become key to developing and maintaining an experienced faculty.

Purpose: This evaluation of a peer mentorship program for predoctoral and postdoctoral gerontological nurses examined its efficacy, utility, and potential for improvement.

Methods: A web-based survey was developed, implemented, and completed by 22 mentees and 17 mentors (71% and 61% response rates, respectively) as part of the evaluation.

Discussion: The peer mentorship program was found to be valuable by both mentors (64.7%) and mentees (72.7%) in helping mentees further develop their careers and networks and providing mentors with supported mentorship experience.

Conclusion: The peer mentorship program could serve as a model for other professional organizations, academic institutions, and consortiums to enhance and extend the formal vertical mentorship provided to early academic career individuals.

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Introduction

The Building Academic Geriatric Nursing Capacity (BAGNC) program, which was funded through the generosity of the John A Hartford Foundation, was created in 2000 to prepare the next generation of expert gerontological academic leaders and researchers (Franklin et al., 2011). The program included a substantial funding commitment for 2-year predoctoral Patricia G. Archbold Scholarships and postdoctoral Claire M. Fagin Fellowships. Alumni of the BAGNC predoctoral and post-doctoral programs developed a formal alumni group in 2010. In 2011, the alumni formed a Peer Mentoring Committee and developed a Peer Mentoring Program described in detail elsewhere (Bryant et al., 2015). The Peer Mentoring Program used the framework developed by McBride (2011) and the “mentoring forward” peer mentoring model (Byrne & Keefe, 2002) to enhance new scholars’ and fellows’ experience in the program through peer mentoring from program alumni just a few years ahead of them in their career. In addition, an underlying intent was to support the development and expansion of robust professional networks between new scholars and fellows and program alumni, providing them with an additional sounding board outside their home institutions. Details regarding the actual expectations of mentors and mentees are described elsewhere (Bryant et al., 2015). This article (a) describes the evaluation of the first 3 years of the Peer Mentoring Program, (b) examines areas of need for sustaining the program into the future based on the experiences of mentors and mentees, and (c) discusses the program’s applicability to other fields within nursing and beyond.

Background

The need for pre-doctoral, post-doctoral, and early career faculty to have professional development opportunities is recognized as key to growth and success across academic health disciplines, including nursing (Boyden, 2000; Drummond-Young et al., 2010), pharmacy (Brock et al., 2014), and medicine (Sambunjak, Straus, & Marusic, 2006). Academic career success requires faculty with expertise in effectively juggling teaching/mentoring, research, clinical practice and service role expectations as applicable to appointment series (e.g., tenure track, clinical track, and so forth), while producing a steady stream of publications. This is particularly true in academic nursing where a shortage of senior and midcareer faculty due to an aging and retiring faculty (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2014), heightens the need for early career individuals to mature more quickly and become mentors themselves. Therefore, professional development programs need to provide early career faculty with tools and support to develop expertise in

teaching, research and practice, as well as prepare them for academic leadership roles.

Effective early career development has generally required institutional commitment, including allocations of resources and senior faculty to support, promote, and role model best practices and institutional values. Early career individuals who are formally mentored by senior faculty enjoy a host of advantages over faculty without formal mentoring, including faster career advancement and higher job satisfaction (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2014). Most formal mentoring relationships have included more senior faculty mentoring early career faculty, reflecting a vertical mentoring approach. However, with the shortage of experienced faculty in nursing, maintaining stable and effective vertical mentorship as the sole form of mentorship may become untenable. Thus, there is a significant need to develop different models for supporting early career individuals that transcend the traditional vertical mentoring models.

To augment the vertical mentoring provided within the BAGNC pre-doctoral and post-doctoral fellowship programs, fellowship alumni created a Peer Mentoring Program. A model for the growth and development of nurse leaders (McBride, 2011) served as a guide during the development of the Peer Mentoring Program. McBride’s model for mentoring and leadership development centers around the mentor-mentee relationship. The mentor model has values that contribute to the successful launching of a career within the academic home and the profession. Over the course of 15 years, Dr. McBride refined the model with strategies focused on stages of the individual’s career and the associated developmental tasks. The model, informed by Dr. McBride’s work as a faculty member, dean, and leader of several career development and mentorship programs in nursing, has been instrumental in the development of 248 BAGNC program nurse leaders and scholars that participated in the program’s annual leadership meetings and organized mentor-mentee meetings. There are five stages in the model by McBride (2011): Preparation; Independent Contributions; Development of Home Settings; Development of Field/Health Care; and The Gadfly Period. Two stages of the model—Preparation and Independent Contributions—served as the basis for the Peer Mentoring Program, with the mentee-focused development tasks associated with each stage of the model used to guide specific components of the Peer Mentoring Program. During the Preparation stage, the focus is on developing a knowledge base through research designed to advance the nursing profession; during the Independent Contributions stage, the focus is on working independently as well as interdependently with nursing colleagues and interprofessional scholars in activities such as building their own research teams, securing external funding, and disseminating peer-reviewed publications (McBride, 2011). Activities related to the Preparation stage include mentored presentations, publication reviews, and membership

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