

Exploring the present challenges of the associate degree in nursing program director role: Part II¹

Ronda D. Mintz-Binder DNP, RN, CNE*, Marie K. Lindley RN, MSN, PhD(c)

College of Nursing, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, TX 76019-0407, USA

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Abstract This study explores the unique work life and challenges in the role of the associate degree in nursing program director. Directors in this study reported how faculty issues and workload issues are primary challenges to their role. If these challenges remain unaddressed, difficulty in retaining current seasoned directors and recruiting future leaders into this role will continue.

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As discussed in Part I, associate degree in nursing (ADN) program directors currently face several challenges including flat or reduced budgets, unfilled faculty positions, pressure to increase enrollment, insufficient secretarial support, and mounting paperwork. The lack of unqualified educators contributes significantly to the growing number of unfilled faculty positions. Current educators are retiring at a faster rate than those entering into nursing education ([American Association of Colleges of Nursing \[AACN\], 2012](#)). These and more challenges continue to impact high workloads and decreased job satisfaction, creating excessive stress for ADN program directors ([Mintz-Binder & Fitzpatrick, 2009](#); [Mintz-Binder & Sanders, 2012](#); [Mintz-Binder, 2014](#)).

The thematic analysis portion of a hardiness assessment study of ADN program directors will be presented. This piece of the study aimed at discovering details about the challenges that directors faced in their position. By understanding the challenges, interventions may be created that would lead to increased job satisfaction and decreased stress. The role may then become more enticing to future

nurse leaders. These changes may also create a healthier work environment for staff, which is a primary role of managers and directors ([Shirey, Ebright, & McDaniel, 2008](#); [Mintz-Binder & Sanders, 2012](#)).

1. Background challenges of the ADN program director role

Major challenges that ADN program directors face are faculty shortages, workload burden, inadequate resources, and student issues/behaviors. The following presents a few key studies that address these specific concerns.

1.1. Faculty issues—shortages

As recently reported in the 2011 National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) Report to Constituents, the number of full-time faculty decreased in the baccalaureate, diploma, and ADN programs. The reported number of full-time and part-time faculty fell in the master's degree, baccalaureate, and diploma programs. Yet, student enrollment numbers increased in the master's degree and baccalaureate programs ([NLNAC, 2011](#)). [Fang and Li \(2012\)](#) reported through the AACN 2012–2013 Survey of Universities a full-time vacancy in 1,181 schools of nursing, which equated

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: rondamb@uta.edu

to 56.9% of schools reporting faculty vacancy in the United States. Reasons for faculty vacancies included lack of funds (64.1%) and lack of administrative support for additional faculty positions (51.5%).

In addition to dealing with faculty shortages, ADN program directors need to evaluate their faculty as potential candidates for succession planning. This type of planning is difficult as faculty may have an unfavorable view toward increased administrative responsibility. Adams (2007) conducted an exploratory descriptive study of faculty to determine their likelihood of pursuing academic leadership roles. Using the Leadership Practices Observer Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2001), Adams found that only 19% ($n = 20$) would consider the director role. Faculty members cited workload as a primary reason and conflict-related issues as a second reason for not pursuing an administrative role. Examples of conflict-related issues handled by program directors include investigating student complaints, addressing faculty conflicts, coping with student incivility, and evaluating grade disputes.

1.2. Program director workload

Concern over high workload of program directors has been presented by Mintz-Binder (2014). The work of Mintz-Binder et al. has documented the recent surveys indicating high workload, high stress, high burnout, and lower job satisfaction of ADN program directors (Mintz-Binder & Sanders, 2012; Mintz-Binder, n.d.). Mintz-Binder and Sanders (2012) concluded that there is a critical need to address workload issues in order to retain and recruit future ADN program directors.

1.3. Program resources

Seago, Alvarado, and Grumbach (2007) conducted a descriptive study using structured interviews with six California program directors in 2004. Four of the six participants were ADN program directors and two were bachelor of nursing program directors. Their content analysis revealed that the program directors identified reduced funding in their ADN programs as their most significant financial pressure. Several directors commented that if they received external funding, the reporting requirements to the funding agencies combined with the resulting need for more administrative support brought additional external pressures. This group of directors reported the lack of clinical sites for student education as one of the top three internal program pressures. Other internal pressures were lack of physical space and lack of qualified faculty leading to limited student enrollments.

1.4. Student behaviors

The increase of student incivility reported in the literature is of concern not only for faculty members but also for program directors as well. Documented and

reported cases of inappropriate faculty–student encounters are submitted to program directors to handle. The first two studies report the effects of these encounters on faculty, and the third study looks at program directors. If the incivility causes faculty to resign, hiring replacement faculty falls on the program director. With most of the programs reporting faculty shortages, this can be a difficult task for program directors.

Kolanko et al. (2006) participated in a panel discussion at the National League for Nursing (NLN) Education Summit in 2005. Members involved in this panel discussion that included faculty and one program director focused upon student behaviors as a topic because nursing faculty members across the country were reporting an increase in student incivility. Some faculty reported that they considered leaving their positions because of the behaviors of the students.

Luparell (2007) interviewed 21 faculty members who experienced uncivil encounters with nursing students. Luparell found that the effects of student incivility on faculty include decreased self-esteem, loss of confidence, emotional and physical reactions, and others. Many of these encounters between faculty and students arose from conflict surrounding student performance or grades.

Mintz-Binder and Calkins (2012) reported findings of bullying toward ADN directors. One third ($n = 77$) of the surveyed directors reported bullying by either a faculty member or students. The directors reported that the primary offender was one of their own faculty members ($n = 33$; 42.8%) with students ($n = 30$; 38.9%) as the second most likely offender. Of interest was that the highest percentage of directors reporting bullying were in the first year of holding the director position. The majority of bullying that occurred was within the first 5 years of holding the director position ($n = 40$; 51.9%).

1.5. Reported challenges and desired skills

In a recent doctoral dissertation exploring the role of the community college nursing program director, Duree (2011) received 241 responses from 625 ADN directors surveyed. The challenges listed by these directors included (a) time management, (b) workload, (c) conflict management, (d) student concerns, and (e) faculty/staff concerns. In addition, when asked to list skills that directors wished they could learn were as follows: (a) conflict management skills; (b) managing with limited autonomy; (c) budget; (d) effective communication with all college members; and (e) proper time management skills. Most of the directors stated that they wished they had learned these skills before finding themselves in director positions.

As the literature above demonstrates, some research exists regarding the role of the ADN program director and their challenges. As Mintz-Binder and Sanders (2012) highlighted in their study, there is a need for research and interventions to address the challenges of the director role. Effective

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