



Learning and teaching in clinical practice

Professional development utilizing an oncology summer nursing internship

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of an oncology student nursing internship on role socialization and professional self-concept. This mixed-methods study utilized a convergent parallel approach that incorporated a quasi-experimental and qualitative design. Data was collected through pre and post-survey and open-ended questions. Participants were 11 baccalaureate nursing students participating in a summer oncology student nursing internship between their junior and senior years. Investigators completed a content analysis of qualitative questionnaires resulted in categories of meaning, while the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test was used to compare pre and post internship scores. Aggregated mean scores from all instruments showed an increase in professionalism, role socialization, and sense of belonging from pre to post-internship, although no differences were significant. Qualitative data showed participants refined their personal philosophy of nursing and solidified their commitment to the profession. Participants did indicate, however, that the internship, combined with weekly debriefing forums and conferences, proved to have a positive impact on the students' role socialization and sense of belonging. Despite quantitative results, there is a need for longitudinal research to confirm the effect of nursing student internships on the transition from student to professional.

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Introduction

With international concerns over a nursing shortage (Canadian Nurses Association, ND; Feng and Tsai, 2012; Juraschek et al., 2012), safe staffing and stability of the workforce (Humphries et al., 2014; Roth and Johnson, 2011), costs of recruiting, orienting, and training new hires (Jones, 2008; O'Brien-Pallas et al., 2006), and the personal stakes involved in newly qualified nurses transitioning from student to Registered Nurse (RN) (Feng and Tsai, 2012; Phillips et al., 2014), the investments at the societal, organizational, and individual planes are high for the nursing workforce. Turnover in the new RN graduate workforce is considerably higher than in the more experienced nursing workforce (Duchscher, 2001, 2009; bib_Duchscher_2009; Tseng et al., 2013). A study by Kovner et al. (2007) showed that 13% of new graduate licensed RNs changed their principal jobs after one year, and 37% reported that they felt ready to leave nursing altogether. In a 2007–2008 cohort of 1690 newly licensed RNs, 41% had left or planned to leave their

current job in less than three years despite the intention of 93% to stay in nursing (Brewer et al., 2012). In Taiwan first year turnover is greater than 57% (Tsai et al., 2014). Cancer centers have been particularly impacted by turnover with center vacancies of 25% or more (Childress and Gorder, 2012), a disappointing finding given that cancer was the worldwide, leading cause of death in 2012 (World Health Organization, 2014).

Cantrell and Browne (2005) noted that dissonance between academic preparation and clinical practice is an ongoing concern for professionals in academic and service settings. In the US, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) (2011) addressed the challenges of transitioning from nursing student to professional, and the need for managing this transition in order to reduce turnover rates. Solutions have been initiated in pre-registration (generic) programs and in the workplace through the first year of employment (Rush et al., 2014). These transitional programs have been classified as externships, internships, residencies, preceptorships, mentorships, and fellowships. In medicine, the nomenclature is standard and sequential, but in nursing the transitional phases are less well defined (Kramer et al., 2013). One nursing pre-licensure transitional program (PLTP) exemplar typically occurs between junior and

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senior years in a traditional baccalaureate program (Cantrell et al., 2005), and has been shown to increase understanding of the culture of nursing as well as increase nursing retention. There are many anecdotal statements regarding the success of PLTPs (Cantrell and Browne, 2005). There is a lack of research, however, evaluating the influence of PLTPs on professional socialization and role transition as the undergraduate moves from student nurse to graduate nurse. The purpose of this study was to examine the role that an oncology PLTP plays in increasing professionalism, role socialization (being indoctrinated into the role of nurse), and sense of belonging in student nurses entering their senior year of a baccalaureate nursing program.

Background

Role transition

The transition from student to graduate nurse is a vital period in several ways. It is the quality of the transitional experience that is likely to influence graduate nurse retention (Clare and van Loon, 2003; Duchscher, 2009). This process includes not only the learning and refinement of technical skills that graduate nurses must master, but maturation into the role of being a professionally licensed individual with the inherent responsibilities that accompany licensure.

A number of additional issues within the transitional period, such as work readiness and interpersonal conflict, influence graduate nurse self-confidence and retention rates (Duchscher, 2009). New nurses may suffer a “reality shock,” defined as a sudden comprehension that their perception of what their new career will be like is far different from what they had imagined.

The issue of role socialization of newly graduated nurses can create stress and added pressure for the transitioning graduate nurse. Taylor et al. (2001) studied socialization of graduate nurses utilizing Corwin's Role Orientation Scale, comprised of three scales measuring professional, bureaucratic, and service orientation. The researchers found a deficit in role socialization in the newly graduated nurse. Feng and Tsai (2012) used a qualitative design to study role socialization of new baccalaureate nursing graduates in Taiwan. The respondents provided numerous examples of incongruity between organizational and bureaucratic demands of the workplace and the professional expectations their education inspired. Using a constant comparative analysis, the researchers uncovered three themes: overwhelming chaos, learning by doing, and being an insider, a step that came after months of work.

Nursing student internship programs

Internships have been developed to support clinical learning and entry into practice (Paul et al., 2011), role socialization and sense of belonging (Cantrell et al., 2005), RN recruitment and retention into both general (Salt et al., 2008) and specialized practice (Cantrell et al., 2005); and hospital systems (Roth and Johnson, 2011; Steen et al., 2011). Cantrell and Browne (2005) collected data on 26 RNs who had completed a PLTP in a pediatric hospital and who after graduation worked at the same institution. Based on length of employment or unit placement they were matched to 26 RNs who had never participated in a PLTP. An ANCOVA was conducted and in an unanticipated finding, nurses who had participated in the PLTP had a midlevel of professionalism, while nurses hired into their positions without first participating in a PLTP showed a high level of professionalism and autonomy. This finding was statistically significant although no statistical difference was found in sense of belonging or in job satisfaction.

Steen et al. (2011) investigated the effect of the internship position and ease of transmission from student to RN in nurses who had completed an internship program in a large academic hospital system in California. Subjects were recruited from a finite set of 60 nurses who had participated in an institutional student internship program and who took positions in the same hospital system following graduation. A questionnaire was developed to explore study camaraderie with peers, familiarity with the system and culture, confidence, expectation for advancement. Eighty-three percent of the eligible nurses returned their survey. Subjects believed the internship program increased their confidence in performing nursing tasks, in delivering care to patients with greater acuity, and in interacting with patients and family. They felt familiarity with hospital personal (RNs, managers, support staff, and physicians) eased their transition from student to graduate nurse. Over 70% believed their opportunity for job placement and career advancement was positively influenced by the internship experience.

PLTPs in oncology may be particularly important given the limited cancer-related material found in nursing curriculum worldwide (Cunningham et al., 2006; Savopoulou, 2001), and the positive impact it has on attitudes new nurses' attitudes. Coakley and Ghiloni (2009) explored the views of nurses who had participated in an oncology PLTP between their junior and senior year, and found that the program allowed them to know “what nursing really is” (p. 50), as well as the opportunity to consider whether oncology would personally be a good choice.

In a comparative, quasi-experimental study of graduating students in Taiwan, Tseng et al. (2013) evaluated outcomes from an academic (nursing faculty) externship program and a corporate-academic (nursing faculty and nurse managers) externship program designed for junior college nursing students. All students improved their nursing competence scores, but there were statistically significant mean score differences in the corporate-academic program in subscales reflecting clinical care ($p = 0.005$), professional development ($p = 0.002$), and leadership ($p = 0.000$). One year post-graduate employment retention rates were 42.1% of the academic externship and 79.2% in the corporate-academic program ($p = 0.025$). The researchers speculate that the partnership of nursing faculty with clinically-based nurse managers assists senior nursing students in attaining superior nursing competency and later in the retention on a fledgling workforce.

Sherman and Dyess (2010), in an editorial, articulate the need for students to network with nursing leaders during their clinical rotations. They challenge faculty to reconsider their historical position that nursing students refrain from employment during their basic training because employers may be predisposed to hire students who have worked within the organization. Similarly internships and volunteer experiences widen a students' prospect for employment as he/she gets the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities. The take home message is experiences that cultivate student professional and organizational integration beyond the classroom and traditional clinical setting fosters an easier transition from student to qualified licensed nurse.

Methods

Research design

A mixed methods, convergent parallel design was chosen to explore the outcomes of a nursing student internship on role socialization and professional self-concept. Latent variables of professionalism, role socialization and sense of belonging were measured by ordinal and interval scaled questionnaires. Change in

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