



Developing a center for nursing research: An influence on nursing education and research through mentorship

Cheryl A. Krause-Parello^{a,*}, Annaruth Sarcone^a, Kimika Samms^b, Zakiya N. Boyd^a

^a Center for Nursing Research, Kean University, School of Nursing, 1000 Morris Avenue Union, NJ 07083, USA

^b Kean University College of Education, 1000 Morris Avenue Union, NJ 07083, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 12 August 2012

Keywords:

Education
Nursing
Mentor
Mentee
Mentorship
Research

ABSTRACT

Nursing research, education, and mentoring are effective strategies to enhance and generate nursing knowledge. In order to explore new opportunities using an international and interdisciplinary approach, a Center for Nursing Research (CNR) was developed at Kean University a public institution for higher education in the United States. At the CNR, nursing professionals and students collaborate in all aspects of nursing education and the research process from a global perspective and across disciplines. The advancement of knowledge and understanding is of absolute importance to the field of nursing and other collaborative fields. The CNR functions to educate nursing faculty and students through scholarly activities with an ongoing commitment to nursing education and research. Mentorship in nursing education and research fosters professional, scholarly, and personal growth for both the mentor and mentee. The CNR serves as a model vehicle of applied, functional mentoring strategies and provides the venue to allow the mentor and mentee to collaborate in all aspects of nursing education and research.

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Introduction

Mentorship, found frequently in literature to describe a positive supervisory type relationship, is not used by many countries (Fulton et al., 2007). In the United States of America (USA) the term “mentorship” is widely used to describe a relationship between a mentor and a mentee that fosters the training and career development of young professionals (Blackburn et al., 1981). Referring specifically to a clinical context, the term mentor and mentee are less common but instead, the term supervision and preceptor are often used interchangeably (Andrews and Wallis, 1999).

The field of nursing has taken a global approach at encouraging mentorship relationships between nurse educators and students, even those outside the field of nursing. The creation of a mentorship relationship in the clinical field more specific in the discipline of nursing has made immense progress over the last few years. The fostering and growth of a mentor–mentee relationship in nursing has gained international perspectives and attention and as a result has been featured more prominently in recent research publications. Articles relating to mentorship in the clinical setting have posited variance such as; perceptions of mentors in the hospital

setting (Kneafsey, 2007); nurse’s viewpoint on effective mentors (Ferguson, 2011); and student nurses’ supervisory experience in the clinical setting (Saarikoski et al., 2007). Research reports such as the ones described provide the discipline of nursing with a worldview on mentoring from the experience of both the mentor and mentee. Despite the fact that mentoring does occur in other nursing settings such as nursing education, the concept of mentoring in the clinical setting has been the primary focus of transitioning novice nurses to a more advanced level of expertise (Morrison-Beedy et al., 2001).

However, the literature review conducted revealed that there is a lack of mentoring models in nursing at the higher education level. In order to assist in the evolution of nursing knowledge, it is important to establish mentoring relationships in nursing education and research at the tertiary level. Mentorship in nursing education and research cultivates professional, scholarly, and personal growth for both the mentor and mentee. Nurses participating in the mentoring process provide the mentee with unique experiences that cannot be taught in a classroom setting. The mentor–mentee relationship and mentoring experience can promote positive professional attitudes toward the discipline of nursing. Through mentorship, the mentee can become more prepared and knowledgeable on current trends and practices in the field. The importance of a mentor–mentee relationship in nursing has lead to the conceptual creation of a center for nursing research (CNR), designed as an environment to foster the mentorship relationship. The CNR has fostered positive relationships between the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 908 737 3387.

E-mail addresses: ckrausep@kean.edu (C.A. Krause-Parello), sarcone@kean.edu (A. Sarcone), sammsk@kean.edu (K. Samms), boydz@kean.edu (Z.N. Boyd).

mentees and mentors as evidenced by except provided by CNR mentees that are included throughout the manuscript.

The purpose of the manuscript was to critically review available literature on mentorship models created with the objective of strengthening the relationship between nursing faculty and students. Additionally, this article highlights how the establishment of a CNR at the tertiary level is an ideal approach for fostering the growth and development of a mentoring model for scholars both internal and external to the discipline of nursing.

Literature review

Historically, the concept of mentoring has a long documented narration. In Greek mythology, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, advised multiple Greek leaders during the Trojan War in Homer's *The Iliad* (Homer, 1990). Interestingly, Athena was disguised as a man and introduced herself as Mentor (Greek: Μέντωρ/Méntōr; gen.: Μέντορος). It is from Greek mythology that the term mentor was coined and has become a concept used today in contemporary society. The historical literature on mentorship remains salient; therefore, the content should be considered current as the roles and responsibilities of positive mentorship have for the most part remained unchanged. A mentorship relationship typically involves a mentor and a mentee. The purpose of the mentor is to guide an individual into becoming a successful professional; while on the other hand the mentee is the beneficiary whose professional growth would benefit from the relationship with a mentor (Kahn and Greenblatt, 2009; Kostovich et al., 2010).

Mentorship in nursing occurs both formally and informally and has been associated with the development of nurse leaders (McCloughen et al., 2009; Tourigny and Pulich, 2005). In nursing education, informal mentoring activities among the mentor and mentee may include peer support, mutual sharing of ideas related to classroom teaching, learning styles, and teaching techniques (Bastable, 2008). However, unlike nursing education, informal mentoring activities in nursing research may include discovering new ideas to enhance nursing education, research, and scholarship, and discussing and debating conceptual models and research methodologies.

Formal mentoring activities on the other hand are based on a set of objectives and goals and may include the development of a nursing curriculum, academic courses, and nursing education programs for continuing education units (CEUs). Formal activities are expected to be achieved through ongoing working relationship between the mentor and the mentee. Additionally, formal mentoring activities may include database searches, conducting literature reviews, submitting grant applications developing manuscripts, publishing peer-reviewed journal articles, assisting in the institutional review process, publishing peer-reviewed manuscripts, developing manuscripts, assisting in the internal review process, and inclusion on a research team to assist with data collection, data analysis, and dissemination of the findings at professional conferences. Regardless of whether mentoring occurs formally or informally, the aim is to enhance the mentees' development in professional roles (Pitney and Ehlers, 2004).

Although there is a wealth of available literature on mentorship in the field of nursing, upon conducting an extensive search, the literature examined revealed that there is no connection between nursing research centers and mentorship models or activities. In light of this missing literature, it is crucial to explore the establishment of CNRs as an avenue for creating mentorship models and opportunities in the field of nursing.

It is critical that nursing students engage in educational opportunities to facilitate the development of nursing science (Morrison-Beedy et al., 2001). According to Byrne and Keefe (2002), the development of nursing science is the foundation for the growth of the

nursing discipline and profession. Individuals who participate in such opportunities during their nursing education are likely to develop skills that will be useful to them in their careers, and the development of competent nurse researchers promotes the advancement of nursing science through scientific inquiry (Morrison-Beedy et al., 2001). In order to expand on the growth and development of nursing science and provide unique opportunities through scientific inquiry and mentorship, a CNR was established at Kean University. A brief outline of this CNR has been provided as both a demonstration and guide toward cultivating competent nursing leaders.

Center for nursing research

A Center for Nursing Research was developed at Kean University, a public university for higher education in the United States of America, with an understanding of the importance of providing an educational setting for mentoring opportunities for both nursing students and non-nursing students alike. Although there are many CNRs worldwide there were no clear guidelines in the current literature for creating a university-based CNR to enhance mentoring relationships. Reasonable reflective thinking was employed by nursing scholars who focused on how to create a center geared toward providing nursing faculty and students with cutting edge research-related technique, tools, and skills aimed at enhancing their contribution to the field of nursing.

In order to assist nurse researchers who may be interested in creating a center for nursing research the following steps were taken to cultivate the CNR's development. The steps are divided into three stages: pre-developmental stage, developmental stage, and post-developmental stage (see Table 1). In the pre-developmental stage, the idea was discussed with faculty in the School of Nursing. After gaining approval from the faculty members a clear mission, purpose, and list of objectives were created. The objectives developed for the CNR were to sustain an academic research unit at the university, support structural empowerment

Table 1
Steps in the development of the CNR.

Pre-developmental stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed a clear purpose and objectives for center Presented concept at a faculty meeting where concept was approved Applied for and received university award to fund the first year of development
Developmental stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruited graduate students from various fields to work in the CNR Gathered information from established nursing research centers throughout United States to develop a similar model for the CNR Collaborated with active researchers with similar interests Developed community partnerships for research-related activities Developed a comprehensive budget for sustainability of the center Sought internal and external funding opportunities such as grants and gifts Started original research in vulnerable populations including sexually abused children, the elderly, and wounded warriors
Post-developmental stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued ongoing research projects Enhanced collaboration with community partners Presented research findings at international and national nursing education research conferences Submitted publications in peer-reviewed nursing education and research journals as well as content specific related journals

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