

SPN DEPARTMENT



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Easing the Transition: An Innovative Generational Approach to Peer Mentoring for New Graduate Nurses

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Background

In 2012, new graduate nurses on a high-acuity, complex and diverse medical–surgical unit expressed a desire for further support to ease transitioning to independent roles after the new graduate nurse Versant RN Residency program. This intensive 22-week program provides classroom didactics, skills labs, subject matter expert speakers, mentors, debriefing sessions and unit-based preceptors for on-the-job clinical learning and demonstration of skill competency. After the program ends, there is no hospital-wide defined support program for new graduate nurses. Some units have a liaison, some have a buddy system, and some have no structure but rely on the value the institution places on support and teamwork. The result often is reality shock with many new graduate nurses expressing the sense of an abrupt drop off in oversight and support. Staff nurses completed a needs survey to determine whether there was support for instituting a mentoring program. Thirty staff nurses completed the survey and 96.7% of them agreed that new graduate nurses would benefit from participating in a mentorship program.

Literature Review

A review of the literature confirmed professional organizational support for mentorship programs to aid in the transition from student to professional nurse. The American Nurses Association (ANA) in 2010 and the [Institute of Medicine's \(IOM\), 2010 Report on the Future of Nursing](#) both identified the additional support needed by recent graduates and advocated for innovative, structured mentorship programs for newly licensed nurses. At the 2014 National Magnet Conference, ANA

President Pam Cipriano listed mentoring of new graduate nurses as one of the top five goals for the ANA.

An integrative review completed by [\(Rush, Adamack, Gordon, Lilly, and Janke \(2013\)\)](#) supported developing a mentoring program as there was strong evidence linking mentoring to stress reduction through by providing guidance and support throughout the transition period from new graduate to independent nurse. All studies that involved mentorship programs enhanced new graduate nurse retention. A systematic review of the literature by [Chen and Lou \(2014\)](#) found that mentorship programs are essential to retaining new nurses and reducing human resource costs. The programs ease stress for new nurses, reduce the frequency of using trial and error methods, stabilize human resources and facilitate the success of new nurses transitioning to their independent roles. The authors further note that mentorship programs teach new nurses to consider patients' rights, which is key for setting the stage for professional life-long learning. However, an integrative review of best practices of new graduate nurse transition programs concluded that while formal transition programs may aid in retaining new nurses, there are insufficient rigorous studies to confidently reach such a conclusion [\(Rush et al., 2013\)](#).

Formal mentorship programs theoretically benefit both the new graduate and the institution. However, there remains a need for innovative, structured mentorship programs that both mentors and mentees find helpful. In a systematic review,

The mission of the Society of Pediatric Nurses is to support its members in their practice. One means of accomplishing this mission is to keep membership informed of innovative initiatives involving the board, committees, and members that promote research, clinical practice, education, and advocacy within the larger pediatric healthcare community. This department serves that purpose.

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Chen and Lou (2014) noted that seniority often was the primary criterion for becoming a mentor, citing the positive results when senior nurses were involved. The benefit of an experienced nurse mentor included being better able to relieve stress and provide guidance.

There are reports in the literature that demonstrate promising results using peer mentoring. A well-designed university study using a teacher/senior/sophomore structure revealed an improvement in the clinical judgment and critical thinking of novice nurses (Harmer, Huffman, & Johnson, 2011). In two other studies in the university setting, a similar generational approach was implemented by pairing novice students with experienced students plus oversight by the professor (Harmer et al., 2011; Li, Wang, Lin, & Lee, 2011). In the study by Li et al. (2011), the experienced students who took on a mentor role were challenged to think through questions and provide reasonable answers to the novices. Dennison (2010) concluded that an academic peer-mentoring program designed to enrich the student nurse experience improved student nurses' leadership and teaching skills. Mentees reported that they had more opportunities to practice skills and critical thinking both of which contributed to their comfort in the environment. The novices had improved self-confidence, which prepared them to become mentors in the future. The role of the professor was seen as very important to ensure quality of the relationship and to support the mentor and mentee students.

Echoing the value of having a seasoned mentor plus peer support, Rush et al. (2013) concluded that new graduates benefit from peer-support mentoring opportunities. Austria, Baraki, and Doig (2013) evaluated peer mentoring models using a learning partnership of junior and senior nursing students. The result was improved skills and learning with 85% of the juniors in the study stating that they felt comfortable with feedback from the seniors and benefited from their experience. Rush et al. (2013) noted that mentors should receive some formal training before beginning the mentorship role and the mentorship programs should provide support for at least nine months to ease the difficult transition from novice to independent nurse.

Generational Approach to Peer Mentoring

The generational approach to peer mentoring captures the contribution of generational diversity in the workforce. The model of two nurse mentors combines the wise, experienced nurse with the open-minded, technologically savvy peer to mentor the new graduate nurse. The program is not always precisely aligned on generational terms with new graduates being of diverse age as more choose nursing as a second career. However it does address the rich diversity of generational perspectives which when valued and integrated can create a more functional, robust and adaptable work force (Hendricks & Cope, 2012). By using the veteran nurse and peer nurse as mentors, the nursing team as a whole can benefit. The veteran nurse can learn to appreciate the technological expertise of the peer nurse as well as learn to incorporate technology in life

outside of work. Peer nurses can learn to value the experience and professionalism of the veteran nurse. Both can learn and grow which will make a stronger team and better outcomes for patients (McNeill, 2012). Lifelong learning is a valuable outcome as nurses at each end of the spectrum have different skills and perspectives (Stephens, 2012).

Program Structure

Motivated by the literature findings and the needs assessment, a recent nurse graduate and a veteran nurse at Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA), a freestanding children's hospital in downtown Los Angeles, collaborated to create a generational mentoring program. The innovative model consisted of a newly licensed nurse, a peer mentor, and a veteran nurse mentor. The program defines the new nurse as an individual who graduated from the Versant RN Residency Program and is transitioning to RN II. The RN II position is achieved six months after graduation from the RN residency program. Each new graduate nurse is assigned two mentors: a peer nurse mentor and a veteran nurse mentor. The peer nurse mentor is defined as a recent graduate of the Versant RN Residency Program who has between two to five years of working experience. The peer provides fresh knowledge of current policy and procedure and familiarity with the technological skills from the simulation lab, computer skills taught in the residency program and recent experience of transferring this knowledge to independent practice. The veteran nurse mentor is a staff member who has over five years of working experience and provides the oversight and teaching role to ensure quality mentoring. In addition, the veteran imparts the skills and wisdom gained through years of practice and shares knowledge of the unit culture as well as that of the hospital. Veteran nurses are able to open doors to opportunities in the organization for professional development and growth. All mentors are required to have at least one year of working experience on the unit where they are mentoring. Mentors and mentees agree to participate in the mentorship program for six months. After six months, the formal mentorship program ends, but mentors and mentees who wish may continue their mentoring relationship.

This program meets the expressed needs of the new graduate nurse, whether related to consolidating clinical knowledge through review of policy and procedures, clinical education and/or practice for nursing responsibilities such as care of central lines or communication skills such as reporting changes in patient status to physicians. The purpose of this program is to establish a collaborative relationship aimed at developing supportive relationships, guiding nurses in professional, personal and interpersonal growth promoting mutuality and sharing information about expectations, opportunities and stressors. The mentee and her/his needs are at the center of all activity and support.

Preceptors and mentors are terms that are often used interchangeably in the literature. However for this program, there is a difference. The preceptor is defined in mandatory training modules at CHLA as a teacher who assesses and

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