

Transitioning Hospital-Based Nurse Leaders to Professional Doctorates

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The collaboration for the project Transitioning Hospital-Based Nurse Leaders to the Practice Doctorate (Doctor of Nursing Practice [DNP] degree program) was initiated by Case Western Reserve University. Participating hospitals included Greenwich (CT) Hospital, Mt. Sinai Hospital (NYC), Carilion Health Care System (Roanoke, VA), Exeter Hospital (Exeter, NH), Shore Memorial Hospital (Atlantic City, NJ), and the North Shore Long Island Jewish Health System (Long Island, NY). The partnership is focused on col-

laboration that enhances both nursing education and practice. This DNP program for hospital-based nurse administrators and advanced practice nurses (APNs) has been offered onsite in these hospitals to strengthen evidence-based practice, thus improving the quality of healthcare delivered in the partner hospitals. The benefit to the educational institution is the enrichment of the teaching learning experience through inclusion and integration into the curriculum of content regarding current issues and challenges in healthcare delivery.



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The partnership is a dynamic and empowers hospital-based nurses to enhance their leadership positions within their hospital or healthcare system while supporting attainment or maintenance of Magnet[®] status hospital recognition at the institution. All of the hospital cohort DNP students also are encouraged to become involved at the local, regional, national, and global level of care delivery, participating through professional association committees and local public and professional forums. The School of Nursing faculty and administration, partnering with chief nursing officers of the hospitals and other members of the hospital administrative staff, work to meet the challenges of transitioning nurses into leadership positions. Within the partnership, there is attention to the 21st century American Association of Colleges of Nursing-supported professional doctorate program (the DNP) and the development of key indicators inherent in preparing a workforce of the future.

Receipt of funding from HRSA in 2005 was a tipping point that moved the collaboration in a positive direction. It provided valuable resources for expanding the program from the two original hospitals (Greenwich Hospital and Mount Sinai Hospital) and for further program implementation and evaluation. As part of the grant, the collaboration model was expanded to four additional hospitals, and second cohorts of students were enrolled from the first two hospitals. Representatives from each of the hospitals were instrumental in moving this collaboration forward. They contributed valuable feedback on curriculum and implementation as well as support for the students. Further, many of the senior leadership staff within the nursing department at the hospitals are serving as members of student thesis committees, and have adjunct faculty appointments at the School of Nursing.

The practice-focused doctorate as preparation for leadership moves hospital-based nurse leaders (including administrators and APNs) to a status equivalent to their colleagues from other disciplines, such as doctor of medicine, doctor of dental surgery, doctor of pharmacy, doctor of psychology, and doctor of social work. By developing leadership skills among the DNP students in the hospital cohorts, the collaboration improves nursing practice to substantially benefit underserved populations in the participating hospital partner service areas. Healthy People 2010 (HP 2010) content is integrated throughout the curriculum, as are evidence-based practice and research knowledge and skills.

A hospital site coordinator at each site was funded through the HRSA grant, and assisted with coordination of the program and provided a connection to the School of Nursing. Additional faculty support was provided through the HRSA grant; thus, faculty traveled to the hospital sites to offer courses. The participating hospitals agreed to facilitate enrollment of their nursing leadership staff in the DNP program. A significant reduction in tuition (20%) was offered by FPB to all students from the hospital cohort sites.

There were several resources that provided the foundation for the development of the collaborative program. These included the American Association of Colleges of Nursing position statement regarding the DNP degree¹; HP 2010² and the American Nurses Association American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) Magnet status requirements.³ Each of these was addressed in the formulation of the collaboration to ensure that the needs of the hospital partners and the university were being met.

Nurses who complete the DNP program are skilled leaders in practice, improving quality of care. An ANCC consultant helped to link courses and student experiences to Magnet criteria. The overall project and its specific objectives were evaluated using multiple qualitative and quantitative strategies. For each cohort of DNP students, the progress of the students throughout the program is being tracked. Thus far, since 2005, more than 200 new students have been enrolled in the DNP program through the hospital cohorts; more than 70 have graduated from the DNP program and have assumed additional leadership responsibilities in the hospitals.

CHALLENGES IN PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Greenwich Hospital in Connecticut was the pilot site for this program and assisted in resolving potential problems. Some potential problems that arose in the pilot were availability of student services at the hospital, and tracking and advising by faculty who were physically removed from the students and hospital sites. The collaborative agreement was revised to include a coordinator at each of the sites to help students connect with the School of Nursing. Another challenge was funding for the start-up expenses of the project. Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing (FPB), with the collaboration of the hospitals, received funding from Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Under the Advanced Education Nursing Grants program, the project was funded (HP05330) for 3 years for a total of \$694,786. In addition to this funding, hospital partners were able to access private support to offset some of the tuition costs for individual students.

The program design and curriculum are deeply rooted in evidence-based nursing and research. Each student is required to complete a scholarly project, which may be an independent thesis or an applied research project. The scholarly project is designed by the student in collaboration with a three-member committee and is directly linked to the overall goals identified by the chief nurse executive at the participating hospital. The thesis or applied research project must be a

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were exemplars of professional practice models and systems of evidenced-based practice. She had wondered if there were young nurse leaders today. She met them at Magnet: staff nurses in their 20s and early 30s who were committed to their patients and their professions. These young nurses embraced opportunities to lead and to innovate.

The return to a faculty role involved scholarship as well as practice and teaching. A college research group had a Robert Wood Johnson grant and invited Madeline to join weekly meetings and chart audit sessions as a research associate. This experience made quality questions come alive. It afforded opportunities to see the current state of practice environment, hospital units, and clinical processes as well as the richness of interdisciplinary research teams. The economist and psychologist on the team brought diverse perspectives and methods of data analysis. Four team members attended the annual research meeting of Academy Health together. This conference is the leading national health services research conference and convenes economists, policy-makers, health-care administrators, physicians, nurses, and others.

With all of this, Madeline still longed for international service. She had prepared to travel to Kenya in January 2008, but the trip was cancelled due to post-election riots. When a colleague announced she was going to Haiti, Madeline offered to go with her. They traveled to rural Duchity where they worked to improve sanitation and hygiene. She has continued involvement with this work.

All of these experiences prepared her for "frontline" service as nursing professor and patient educator. As a former dean, she is careful not to interfere with the vision and efforts of the current dean, while offering support and suggestions. She has taught courses to undergraduate and graduate students, and has been able to provide a historical basis for today's realities. Faculty members have sought her out for assistance with organizational process problems. She has provided mentorship and support to new faculty. She prizes relationships with her patients and students. She is amazed at how little she thinks of the C-Suite, however when she does, she trusts that there are individuals committed to keeping the institution operating well so that she can serve on the frontline. ■

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significant contribution to existing nursing knowledge and suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed journal or a book. Many of the DNP from the hospital cohorts have published their thesis results in peer-reviewed, refereed journals.

The evidence of measurable positive outcomes is directly reflected in the hospital-based projects initiated by the students. Also, there has been a consistent effort focused on dissemination through national and international presentations at scientific meetings and publications in refereed journals. Publications have appeared in key nursing administration and research journals including *Journal of Nursing Administration*, *Journal of Nursing Management*, *Journal of Nursing Care Quality*, *Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, *Applied Nursing Research*, and the *Journal of Interprofessional Care*.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The academic service partnership implemented with the initial six hospitals has been expanded to include additional sites. Also, graduates of the DNP program who are in leadership roles in the partnering hospitals have participated in mentoring new students and in advising on leadership, evidence-based practice, and research projects. There are many opportunities for future collaboration with existing and new partners and several avenues for enhancing the educational experiences for nurse leaders and for changing the practice environments where they lead. ■

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