

## Editorial

# Mentoring and Advising to Reduce the Nursing Shortage

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The current national nurse shortage presents a dilemma that has far reaching consequences. As the status of the healthcare delivery system in the United States (US) hangs in limbo, the delivery of that care is also called into question. Why are these two issues so vitally important? The answer, though obvious, is simple. Regardless of the nature of the health care delivery system, nurses are needed to deliver that care. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) 2016: The US is projected to experience a shortage of Registered Nurses (RNs) that is expected to intensify as Baby Boomers age and the need for health care grows.

Compounding the problem is the fact that nursing schools across the country are struggling to expand capacity to meet the rising demand for care given the national move toward healthcare reform. The perpetuation of the shortage can also be attributed to the fact that nursing schools are limited in the number of students they can accept due to the lack of qualified faculty. In addition, nurses currently in the workforce are reaching retirement age and will join the increasing aging population needing care. It is also worthy to note that inadequate staffing tends to lead to increased stress levels and contributes to nurses leaving the workforce [1].

Today's RNs find themselves in situations that are stressful and demanding. As a result, many nurses leave the profession within the first few years. It is estimated that as much as 50% of new graduate nurses leave within the first year. Compounding this issue is the fact that the average RN turnover rate has been calculated nationally to be at 17.2% with a corresponding hospital vacancy rate of 10% or more [2].

Examination of the declines in the nursing workforce forces one to consider the effects of such shortages on the delivery of health care. In many instances, nurses are required to work long hours, endure stressful situations often leading to fatigue, injury, and job dissatisfaction. Under these conditions, nurses are more likely to make mistakes that lead to medical errors. Unfortunately, under these circumstances, the quality of care can be adversely affected. Many preventable complications such as medication errors, inadequate assessments, improper patient identification and increased mortality rates can occur. Nurses themselves articulate the impact of the current shortage. In a survey conducted by [3], RNs perceived the shortage had been a major problem for five aspects of nursing care: the "early detection of patient complications," "nurses' ability to maintain

patient safety," "quality of patient care," "quality of nurses' own work life," and the "time RNs have to spend with patients."

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the benefits of initiating a mentoring and advising program for new nurses or nurses entering a new specialty. Mentoring, also known as precepting, could potentially address the many issues associated with a nursing shortage. As the demand for more quality health care increases, it is imperative that there be adequate numbers of nurses to meet the challenge.

As challenging as producing adequate numbers of nurses for the future may be, the ability to retain these nurses and maintain the workforce is even more daunting. A potential solution could be in the development of mentoring relationships between novice and experienced nurses. The identified mentor has the prerequisite knowledge and competency to implement a teaching-learning process that will entail the sharing of advice or expertise, role development, and formal and informal support for the novice nurse. Mentoring establishes opportunities for professional growth for both the mentee and mentor. As a result, both individuals experience an increase in career satisfaction. Lack of such satisfaction with a career in nursing may contribute to nurses leaving the profession [4]. According to the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) 2010 report, it is not just mentors and mentees who benefit, the entire profession does as well as patients and their families. The report also concluded that mentoring is an excellent way to strengthen the nursing workforce and, in turn, improve the quality of care and patient outcomes [5].

Although mentoring is an excellent tool, selecting quality mentors is the key to success. Mentors should have outstanding clinical and critical thinking skills and be one who other nurses look to for help. In addition, mentors must possess qualities, such as being nurturing, kind, trustworthy, encouraging, and a good listener [6]. According to Hnatiuk [7]. Mentors provide their mentees with insights that would otherwise have been gained only through trial and error. They ask a lot of questions-especially "Why?"-which encourages mentees to stop and reflect on situations and potential alternatives. Mentors are good at linking different bits and pieces of their mentees' lives, such as work and home, thoughts and feelings, successes and failures. They try to look at the bigger picture and the future.

Many healthcare organizations and leaders have accepted and adopted the concept of mentoring. Developing these partnerships between experienced and novice nurses, can result in a culture of quality and patient safety, increased retention, career advancement opportunities, and improve productivity [8].

Although improved delivery of health care and optimal patient outcomes are the ultimate goals of health care organizations, the ensuing cost benefits of mentoring cannot be overlooked. According to a recent survey, the average cost of turnover for a bedside RN can range from \$37,700 to \$58,400. Consequently, the estimated loss in revenue could approach \$5.2M - \$8.1M. Each percent of change in RN turnover has the potential to cost or save the average hospital an additional \$373,200 [9].

To protect the bottom line, organizations are looking for cost effective ways to reduce turnover. In a study by Fox (2010), it was reported that mentoring was used as an effective approach to increase RN job satisfaction and retention by utilizing trained mentors paired with newly hired or new graduate RNs to provide ongoing support, guidance and assistance. Fox's (2010) results showed that the turnover rate among first-year Registered Nurses (RNs), at a mid western hospital, had mushroomed to 31%. The hospital initiated an RN mentor program to improve satisfaction and reduce turnover. The pilot program included 12 RN mentors and 12 RN protégés from select nursing units. The results showed a 0% turnover rate during the 1-year pilot program [10]. Although these results may not be typical in all instances, the appreciation of any significant reduction in turnover rates can be cost effective over time.

Sustaining a workforce that can meet the demands of a growing population in need of health care is an issue facing the nursing profession. It is estimated that almost one half of newly licensed nurses leave the profession within the first few years. Factors that contribute to this exodus include long hours, knowledge deficits, feelings of incompetency, and stress. The resultant outcome of turnover has a direct effect on patient care delivery, patient safety and organizational profitability.

Mentoring has been utilized to offset the loss of newly licensed nurses and those transferring to new specialties. Pairing experienced nurses with novice nurses has the potential to bolster confidence, competency and well-being of nurses entering the profession or those who are entering a new arena of nursing practice.

Although changes in the health care delivery system may be beyond our control, implementation of mentoring programs that focus on building new nursing graduates' confidence and competence

can assist in making their transition from academia to the practice environment a rewarding time. In addition, organizations must understand that the development of nurses capable of having an autonomous practice and high-functioning critical-thinking skills takes time and requires support [11]. It is time that nurses begin to feed their young instead of having them for dinner.

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