

Utilizing Academic-Clinical Partnerships to Improve New Graduate Nurse Recruitment and Retention

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THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) has identified that the current nationwide nursing shortage is predicted to extend through 2030. Healthcare facilities are experiencing unprecedented turnover and insufficient staffing ratios which is directly impacting staff nursing recruitment and retention (AACN Fact Sheet - Nursing Shortage, 2020). Academic-clinical practice partnerships may positively impact and improve nursing recruitment and retention (Baptiste et al., 2021; Post-Pandemic Clinical Nursing Education: The Value of Academic-Practice Partnerships - American Nurse, 2020).

The application of clinical academic partnerships provides

the opportunity for individualized instruction for students, creating potential future employees (Filipska-Blejder et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2020). Clinical academic partnerships are endorsed by several organizations including the National League for Nursing and American Nurses Association. Key aspects of the structure of these programs include communication, practice involvement, faculty involvement, regulatory involvement, student involvement, and student assignments (Spector et al., 2021).

The school of nursing identified the need to develop innovative options to help prepare new nurse graduates for the overwhelming stress and demands in healthcare facilities. Discussions between

nursing faculty and clinical partners identified an increased difficulty in recruiting graduate nurses. A perioperative nurse educator from a local hospital contacted the school of nursing to discuss interest in developing a collaborative partnership that would focus on creating academic courses introducing nursing students to specialized units experiencing high turnover rates, to help increase the number of new graduate nurses applying for staff positions. In an analysis of national Registered Nurse (RN) turnover rates, Colosi (2024) determined that surgical services, interventional radiology, Gastroenterology (GI) lab, and dialysis were specialty disciplines that were experiencing higher rates of staffing deficits. Partnerships that incorporate technology and skills related to practice areas with high turnover rates can provide clinical opportunities for both students and clinical partners (Wang & Wu, 2023). It was ultimately determined that an optimal unit to initiate this experimental, collaborative opportunity would be in the operating room (OR).

Through this collaborative partnership, a course was developed titled "Introduction to Perioperative Nursing". The pilot course offered an introduction into perioperative nursing during an eight-week summer course. Offering the

course during the summer was considered optimal for avoiding additional stress or increased class schedules during a typical semester. The didactic content was delivered online and was led by the perioperative education coordinator with the school of nursing faculty serving as a resource. Weekly, onsite clinical experiences allowed students the opportunity to explore concepts of sterility, infection prevention, surgical procedures, and safe care of the patient in the OR setting. High-performing staff nurses were selected as preceptors who mentored the students and modeled evidence-based nursing skills within the perioperative environment. Students also had the advantage of exploring their continued interests in beginning their nursing career in OR nursing.

During the interview process for acceptance into this pilot course, nursing student applicants were asked two questions: What do you hope to gain from this experience? What would you like for your personal outcome to be following completion of this course? One student responded, “I have always been drawn towards OR nursing but have been hesitant to commit since I have only had two days in the OR during my clinical days. I hope that this course allows me to really determine that the OR is where my future nursing career should be.” Another student’s response was “I found the OR experience in clinical very eye-opening. I hope to gain more knowledge of the workings of the OR system. The outcome I would like to see is that taking this course will solidify my dream of working in the OR since this is the nursing path that I intend to take after graduation.”

Following the completion of this pilot project, feedback from

nursing students, nursing faculty, and clinical partners was gathered and analyzed. Two nursing students identified that this course was successful in providing them with the knowledge necessary to help determine that the OR was indeed the intended specialty for the start of their nursing careers. For another student, it was substantially obvious that this introduction to perioperative nursing course helped them to realize that they should pursue another specialty area as a new graduate nurse. Based upon feedback from students and preceptors, the school of nursing faculty and the perioperative education coordinator determined that the anticipated objectives of this pilot project were met. The evaluation concluded that it would be beneficial to students and to clinical partners, to consider future course offerings. Clinical partners are hopeful that the implementation of this pilot course would demonstrate an increased interest in graduate nurses accepting positions in the OR and other specialty units.

Evidence-based literature supports the establishment of academic-clinical practice partnerships that will result in the shared benefit of enhancing nursing student learning experiences while also allowing hospitals to initiate and enhance their recruitment processes for specialized units (Baptiste et al., 2021; Post-Pandemic Clinical Nursing Education: The Value of Academic-Practice Partnerships - American Nurse, 2020). The ongoing need for nurses in specialized areas creates opportunities for academic partnerships between schools of nursing and hospitals to help bridge the transition from nursing students to new graduate nurses in clinical areas of high turnover. This pilot project allowed for the development of ongoing discussions for future nursing student clinical opportunities. The school of nursing looks forward to the ongoing collaborative opportunities with the OR and other specialty units that are experiencing high rates of staff turnover. 🔗

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