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CURRENT ISSUES IN SUPERVISION: CULTIVATING ADJUNCT NURSING FACULTY FOR CLINICAL SUPERVISION

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Current Issues in Supervision: Cultivating Adjunct Nursing Faculty for Clinical Supervision

Synopsis:

A common practice in nursing programs is the use of expert clinical practicing nurses in the clinical setting to educate and prepare future novice nurses for entry into professional nursing practice. Nursing programs struggle to maintain consistent clinical adjunct nursing faculty members to instruct nursing students in the clinical environment to support program goals. Nursing programs can utilize a number of strategies to cultivate clinical adjunct nursing faculty in nursing education.

Current Issues in Supervision: Cultivating Adjunct Nursing Faculty for Longevity in Nursing Education

One of the hallmarks of nursing education is integrating theoretical knowledge with clinical practice to develop nursing students for future professional practice. Nursing education programs involve didactic and clinical content to train nursing students. It is common practice in nursing education programs to use adjunct nursing faculty to teach clinical outcomes (Johnson, 2016) and to assist with learning in the clinical setting. Nursing education programs must rely on adjunct faculty to instruct students in the clinical setting. Adjunct faculty members in the clinical setting are valued for their nursing experience and professional expertise. However, these individuals who teach nursing students in the clinical setting have little or no prior teaching experience or knowledge (Eta, Atanga, Atashili, & D’Cruz, 2011). An issue that surrounds the area of nursing education is how to prepare, train and cultivate adjunct nursing faculty to assume the role of clinical supervisor for nursing students. The aim of this paper is to examine this issue.

Need for Adjunct Clinical Faculty: Addressing Nursing Shortages

A growing concern over the years within health care has been the issue of a nursing shortage. There is still much attention internationally and nationally on the topic of a nursing shortage in the health care arena (Jung, Lee, Kang, & Kim, 2017). The nursing shortage was not only experienced within hospital settings at the bedside but in academia with nursing faculty members. The demand for nurses is in response to the growing health care needs of the populous. The aging population is continuing to expand, there is increased needs for access to care and the Affordable Care Act has contributed significantly to the need for health care (Richardson, Goldsamt, Simmons, Gilmartin, & Jeffries, 2014). Additionally, there has been a significant increase in nursing school enrollment (Auerbach, Buerhaus, & Staiger, 2016, p. 2).

The shortage of nurses at the bedside and the shortage of qualified faculty to educate future nurses can have a significant impact on how the health care system is managed. Nurse educators are necessary to continue to populate the nursing profession to not disrupt the health care delivery system. Lack of nurse educators coupled with the increase enrollment in nursing programs require the support of nursing clinicians to meet the demand to produce more practicing nursing professionals. Clinical expert nurses, who are novice educators and lack the experience of qualified nursing program faculty members are being utilized as adjunct clinical instructors to not only expand enrollment but to meet the demand of enrollment in nursing programs (Marin, DeGagne, Akin-Palmer, & Leggett, 2013). The use of adjunct nursing faculty for clinical instruction is not only a staple of nursing education programs but partly in response to the nursing shortages (Johnson, 2016).

Need for Adjunct Clinical Faculty: Clinical Expert as Clinical Educator

The quality of nurse education programs depends largely on the quality of the clinical experience that the student nurse received in the clinical environment (Kaphagawani & Useh, 2013). Nursing programs are challenged to find qualified faculty to teach the growing number of students (Feedman, Greenberg, Jaffe-Ruiz, Kaufman, & Cignarale, 2015).

The decline of nursing faculty to train and develop future nursing professionals is problematic for nursing programs. Furthermore, an issue faced by nursing programs in clinical settings is how to cultivate and train the utilized adjunct clinical faculty on how to teach, instruct and train nursing students. Although these nurses are expert clinicians they have no formal preparation in evaluating students (Poorman & Mastorovich, 2017). No guidelines exist to assist adjunct clinical nurse educators on how to effectively teach and supervise nursing students (Eta et al., 2011, para. 2). The role of adjunct faculty in supervising and instructing nursing students

in the clinical setting is vital to meeting learning outcomes and helping to prepare nursing students for real-world professional practice.

Need for Adjunct Clinical Faculty: Role as Clinical Instructor/Supervisor

Nursing is a practiced based profession, thus learning in the clinical setting is essential to nursing education (Kaphagawani & Useh, 2013). The role of the adjunct clinical faculty member is valuable in a nursing program. The clinical faculty member plays a significant part in helping to meet departmental learning outcomes. Nursing programs must rely on novice clinical instructors to educate and meet clinical learning goals in the clinical setting (Johnson, 2016). Additionally, the role of the adjunct clinical member is crucial to developing the critical thought processes of nursing students and aiding them in integrating theoretical knowledge into clinical practice. Adjunct clinical faculty instructors build the bridge from theory in the classroom to clinical practice at the bedside (Borchardt, 2016).

Clinical adjunct faculty support student learning and can offer valuable practice feedback (Dean, Williams, & Bolnaves, 2016). Nursing students benefit from the recent clinical experience of the adjunct clinical faculty instructor. Clinical adjunct faculty informs practice using theory and research evidence at the bedside along with sound clinical judgement (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2014). The clinical faculty member can be very important resources in helping the student nurse navigate the complexities associated with implementing care at the bedside. Also, they support student nurses during a rigorous educational nursing program while assisting them with comprehending nursing concepts and classroom knowledge. Clinical adjunct educate student nurses, helping them to acquire necessary information that is needed for their professional nursing practice and expose them to skills and competencies not observed in the classroom setting. The clinical adjunct faculty is the clinical expert in the nursing program.

The clinical adjunct faculty member as clinical supervisor for nursing students serve as role-models for the nursing profession; thus influencing behaviors. Students gain learning from role models, intentional or not, essential information is communicated through role-modeling (Adelman-Mullally et al., 2013, p. 30). Students observe the behaviors demonstrated and performed by clinical adjunct at the bedside and acquire them for use in the clinical arena and adapt them for professional practice. Students have the opportunity to take note of the clinical adjunct instructors' collaboration and interactions with other healthcare professionals, providing a landscape of how to respond and perform in the clinical setting. This can provide student nurses with an informal orientation to the profession of nursing practice and give them a vision of a registered nurse.

Adjunct clinical instructors serve as mentors to student nurses, building a great relationship that helps them to transition as nursing professionals. Mentors are very helpful in guiding students (Murray, 2015, para. 9). The mentor-mentee relationship can be crucial in encouraging student nursing on their professional journey. It can also be beneficial in helping them to develop positive character traits and leadership skills that would deem necessary in a professional role. Mentors can have great impact on the professional development of a future registered nurse. Mentorship creates a nurturing environment that student nurses can thrive in, giving them confidence to perform clinical skills and procedures necessary for nursing practice. Clinical adjunct faculty as role models provide a safe place for nursing students to experience learning in a supported surrounding.

Adjunct clinical instructors offer support for learning and are supportive to student growth. Clinical instructors provide strength and support in the clinical area; an environment which can be emotionally and mentally challenging. They assist nursing students by demonstrating behaviors to emulate when unexpected situations arise in the clinical setting.

Support is important and is essential to facilitating coping amongst nurses (Drury, Craigie, Francis, Aoun, & Hegney, 2013, p. 520). Adjunct clinical instructors support student's learning endeavors and encourage students to seek out opportunities to learn new skills and observe hospital procedures and processes. They support students in their growth journey to becoming a professional nurse. Clinical adjunct instructors serve an important role in the development of a future professional nurse.

The adjunct clinical instructor serves many roles in the learning environment in academia. They serve as nurse educators, are clinical experts, are valued as role-models and mentors, support student learning, provide emotional support and contribute in many ways to develop the student. However, these clinical nurse experts are novice educators who lack the necessary training and expertise to properly academically evaluate student learning. They may not possess the skills and knowledge to adequately assess and evaluate student nurses. If there is not official training for the adjunct clinical instructor, they may not properly guide student learning and students may fail to gain the knowledge or skills necessary for professional practice. Additionally, the student nurse may not make the required integration of theory with clinical practice. Therefore, a problem with clinically supervising student nurses in an academic learning environment is a lack of training and/or cultivating to become clinical nurse educator resulting in failure to properly help the nursing student develop, learn and grow as a future nurse professional.

Need for Clinical Adjunct Faculty: Lack of Training and Cultivation

Since clinical adjunct instructors serve such an important role in preparing and developing future nurses, they should not lack the teaching training to help them serve in their role as nursing educator. A qualitative study conducted by Mann and DeGagne (2017) revealed that clinical adjunct faculty felt unprepared and lacked confidence in their role as instructors.

Thus, clinical adjunct faculty may lack the necessary tools, guidance and knowledge to make appropriate and adequate student assessment and evaluation to help develop nursing students for future practice. Additionally, a study by Paul (2015) reported that clinical adjunct instructors had concerns about uncertainty over student assignment expectations and did not perceive themselves as educators. This could place nursing students and nursing programs at a significant disadvantage in terms of meeting program learning goals, achievement outcomes, and having successful outcomes on the nursing pre-licensure examination which could jeopardize status with accrediting bodies and state boards of nursing.

Furthermore, clinical adjunct faculty should not be neglected during the clinical rotation by not receiving ongoing instruction, support, or necessary training to help them develop into the role of nurse educator. Clinical adjunct faculty serves as a valuable resource to nursing students and nursing programs. Their contribution and fresh perspective must be supported; they provide nursing program sustainability (Mann & DeGagne, 2017). Developing clinical adjunct faculty in their role as nurse educator can have a positive impact on nursing program outcomes as well as the nursing profession in terms of contribution to the nursing faculty shortage. Therefore, a targeted, organized, and consistent effort should be utilized to integrate them into academia and their role as nurse educator (Mann & DeGagne, 2017).

Benefit of Cultivation: From Clinical Expert to Nurse Educator

As student nurses require a supportive learning environment, clinical adjunct faculty need to be supported in their role as clinical nurse educator. The appropriate evaluation and assessment of student learning should be reflected in the professional trait and academic character of the nursing educator to assist nursing students on becoming future practicing nurses. A lack of orientation and role development leave clinical adjunct faculty ill-prepared in teaching,

evaluating, assessing, and understanding the needs of students in the clinical setting (Silver-Dunker, 2014). Nursing programs must provide clinical nurse instructors with the strategies and necessary tools to help the novice instructor become a nurse educator which will positively affect student learning. Providing orientation, mentorship and development to clinical nurse instructors results in successful student growth and instruction (Silver-Dunker, 2014, p. 20).

Including programs that support clinical adjunct faculty development in nursing departmental hiring practices such as orientation, mentorship, and continuing education could prove to be advantageous to professional role development.

“Orientation programs provide clinical faculty with support and information on how to teach, evaluation, assess and design a clinical day as well as a resource to complete requirements of the nurse educator role and opportunities to learn and gain new skills as a nurse educator” (Silver-Dunker, 2014, p. 9).

Support can also be provided through mentorship. The mentor-mentee relationship can bring strength to a nursing program and contribute to increased satisfaction amongst clinical adjunct faculty members (Silver-Dunker, 2014). A mentorship program can assist nursing programs in retaining faculty members who potentially can become full-time members. Additionally, mentorship programs enable the mentor to contribute to nursing service and academia by professionally developing a fellow nurse.

Utilizing continuing education is a beneficial tool to assist clinical adjunct instructors in transitioning towards the role of nursing educator. Continuing education can be used as a means to prepare adjunct faculty for help in gaining necessary knowledge and information on instructing nursing students in the clinical setting (Silver-Dunker, 2014, p. 19). Clinical education that addresses clinical improvement, professional development and growth function as transitional tools as novice clinical instructors move towards clinical expert nurse educator.

Conclusion

The shortage of nurse faculty is a key concern in the provision of human resources for healthcare (Nowell, White, Benzus, & Rosenau, 2017, p. 7). Thus, nursing programs are forced to recruit adjunct clinical instructors to instruct in the clinical setting to help prepare nursing students for future programs and to sustain and support nursing program outcomes, maintain program viability. These adjunct clinical instructors who are often clinical experts who lack the experience and knowledge as nursing educators and are ill-prepared to properly assess and evaluate student learning. Nursing programs must make adequate provisions in the form of orientation programs, mentorship and continuous education to assist, improve and professionally develop novice adjunct clinical faculty to transition to expert clinical nurse educator. Continuous growth and development of the adjunct clinical faculty member is a vital aspect to nursing program sustainability and contributes to answering the call to alleviate nursing shortages.

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