

Establishing an Academic Practice Partnership in Long-Term Care: Challenges, Lessons Learned and Hope for the Future

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BACKGROUND

- Academics and health care organizations must strategically align to influence the future registered nurse workforce
- Healthcare is shifting away from emergency and acute care to care provided in transitional, community and long-term care environments
- Long-Term Care (LTC) organizations are an increasingly vital venue for the current and future provision of healthcare services to older adults
- New graduate nurses seldom select positions in gerontological nursing for various reasons



PURPOSE

- The goal was to build an optimal practice environment for students and staff that fostered a reciprocal relationship to address changing healthcare environments
- A Dedicated Education Unit (DEU) was planned between a baccalaureate nursing program and a LTC sub-acute rehabilitation unit



PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

- An Initial presentation was conducted with key stakeholders of the LTC organization to determine feasibility and to secure commitment
- An organizational assessment was completed that revealed opportunities for best practice
- The Logic Model was used to present opportunities for program planning and innovation in designing the DEU
- An embedded faculty was hired to promote a collaborative relationship within the academic-practice partnership. Role was designed to:
 - Foster an effective partnership among all stakeholders
 - Promote evidence-based clinical practices
 - Facilitate student learning and optimal clinical experiences
 - Advance development of the nurses to serve as clinical preceptors
- Robust recruitment strategies were designed to facilitate hiring of BSN prepared nurses to serve as clinical preceptors:
 - Developed unique staffing schedules
 - Partnered with human resources
 - Recruitment campaign
 - Postcard mailing
 - Radio Interview promoting the partnership and the DEU
 - Scholarship program for BSN degree completion
 - Promoted the partnership to graduating seniors
 - Fostering connections for employment between nursing students and Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) positions
 - Implemented a process for interviewing which includes the embedded faculty
 - Redesigned a comprehensive orientation program for licensed and CNA nursing staff

CHALLENGES

- Shortage of baccalaureate prepared nurses to serve as clinical preceptors
- Lack of best practices on the unit
- Turnover of the administrative team during the design and implementation process
- Open RN vacancies
- An inadequate orientation process resulting in high turnover
- Misinterpretation of DEU goals and design between the academic partner and the LTC organization during the administrative changeover
- Competing priorities between academic and organizational objectives and operations

LESSONS LEARNED

- Effective communication is essential
- Understanding the uniqueness of academic and organizational cultures
- Respecting and appreciating the value that each partner contributes
- Successful implementation of the DEU requires time

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Elevate best practices that will sustain quality and safety
- Advance the nursing workforce in this unique setting
- Align a model that fosters collaboration between education and practice

