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Transitioning from Nursing Student to Registered Nurse

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Transitioning from Nursing Student to Registered Nurse: A Literature

Review

A Capstone Submitted to the

University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree

With Honors

Department Of

Nursing

By

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DeKalb, Illinois

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Transitioning from Nursing Student to
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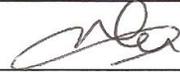
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HONORS CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

The transition from nursing student to registered nurse is not one that would be considered smooth. In fact, it is defined as being challenging, unpredictable and lacking clarity. The purpose of this literature review is to recognize the anxieties that nursing students feel when they transition to working registered nurses, and how to eliminate or limit those anxieties by providing supportive mentors or preceptors. The articles used for this literature review are scholarly articles found through article databases. CINAHL is the main database that was used and all articles were published within the last seven years. Keywords used were “transitioning from student to RN.” Through the research done for this literature review, it was found that a transition period which is often called a nurse residency program, must be offered to new graduate nurses as they start their careers. This allows them to build a support system with each other and become well acquainted with their fellow staff, preceptors and nurse educators. Having this support system behind them aids in their success and confidence levels as they enter the workforce as nurses.

Transitioning from Nursing Student to Registered Nurse: A Literature Review

Introduction

Each year there are thousands of nursing students that graduate from either Associate or Baccalaureate degree programs. In 2016, there were 233,329 degrees awarded to students for Registered Nursing alone (Data USA, 2019). That is a considerable amount of nurses entering the workforce who need to be trained, mentored and supported into a new role that they have never experienced on their own before. The transition from nursing student to Registered Nurse (RN) is often characterized as unpredictable and challenging, and one that is ill defined and lacking clarity (Kaihlanen, Lakanmaa, & Salminen, 2013). Hospitals and other healthcare facilities that are hiring these graduates often find that new nurses are being poorly prepared for the realities of nursing, and the increased amount of responsibility that they will have (Kaihlanen, Lakanmaa, & Salminen, 2013). Blevins (2018), talks about how these graduates also face a reality and transition shock as they enter the workforce, because there is a vast difference between their academia preparation and the integration into practice. Therefore, the need for a standardized transition program for new graduate nurses is a must. The purpose of this literature review is to examine the current trends in research surrounding transition programs for new graduate nurses and how it impacts their success as RNs.

Review of Literature

Blevins (2018) produced an article about the challenge of the transition that nursing students go through as they become RNs. She discusses how this transition is a gradual process because expertise in nursing comes with time, therefore, these new nurses cannot just hit the ground running as soon as they graduate. There must be a transition period that promotes success and retention in nursing. Blevins also states that “the transition process is facilitated by two main

concepts: structure and socialization” (2018). Both of these concepts require continuous support from the hospital itself and from the staff that the new RN will be surrounded by.

The structure portion of the transition process includes what many hospitals today call nurse residency programs (NRP). NRPs provide an organized approach to integrate these new RNs into the hospital and the nursing profession. The purpose of the NRP is to enhance critical thinking skills in the RNs and promote a comradery among the new nurses as they all go through the same emotions and stress of the transition. The NRP provides an environment that is safe for nurses to share their experiences with one another and to debrief any situations they have dealt with. Also, they can get guidance from the nurse educators that lead the NRPs, on how to handle unfamiliar situations (Blevins 2018).

The socialization portion of the transition process might sound like common sense, but it is something that is often overlooked. Working as an RN in the hospital is very different than being the nursing student in the hospital. The environments might look the same, but are perceived very differently. During this time, the new RNs are very vulnerable, therefore, they need to be socialized into the profession and into their clinical units. The nurse educator for the unit, preceptor, and staff should be involved in the development of the new RNs to promote their success. Leaving out this socialization process may cause the new RNs to get discouraged which impacts their engagement and productivity in patient care. It can also cause them to leave the profession, which in turn puts our patients at risk (Blevins, 2018).

Lastly, Blevins discusses how an effective preceptor can make a vast difference on how the new RN is trained and supported when he/she starts their new career. In the world today, there is a very large nursing shortage which can cause short staffing on clinical units. This can result in nurses becoming preceptors without being properly trained or having the desire to fill

that position. These preceptors who are basically forced into training new hires, may not show consistency while demonstrating patient care and may not be as engaged in insuring that the new nurse is learning appropriately. Therefore, when a new graduate is hired, it is essential that the manager select a nurse preceptor that has been trained appropriately and has a desire and passion for precepting. Blevins also talks about how having consistent preceptors is just as important; consistency removes the feeling of being passed around and provides structure. When the same person, or couple of people are training the new RN each shift, it allows for the development of a relationship in which the preceptor(s) can assess the growth and challenges that the trainee may be going through. Knowing these areas of strength and opportunity gives the preceptor the ability to build the new nurse's patient assignment gradually and to his/her comfort level. Having structure and an effective support system allows new nurses to have the resources to be successful; it furthers their growth and enhances the function of the clinical unit (Blevins, 2018).

Research Evaluation

The two main resources used, that were written by Blevins and Kaihlanen et al., had a sufficient level of evidence to prove that transitioning from nursing student to Registered Nurse is a challenging process that needs a structured approach implemented in hospitals today. There was not a lot of research on the specific programs that hospitals and other facilities are using, however Blevins did define the two major concepts that need to be included in order for these programs to be successful. Because there was not a lot of research or resources on this topic specifically, I would recommend that hospitals or other healthcare facilities publish what type of nurse residency or transition programs they are doing, the success rates they have with completion of the program by the new nurses, and evaluate how the program impacted the transition for the new RNs.

Clinical Evaluation

There were common themes amongst the articles analyzed. Some of the themes included the stress and emotion that new graduates feel as they transition to becoming Registered Nurses. Overall, these graduates felt unprepared to enter the workforce because academia did not properly demonstrate what working as an RN was actually like. The colleges that these students went to might have prepared them to learn the information, but not how to put it into practice. Another theme was that having an appropriate preceptor, one with a desire for the position and responsibility of training new nurses, made a huge impact on the success of the new graduates and their comfort level with their fellow staff and patients. All in all, the common themes in the research done support implementing nurse residency programs or transition programs into every hospital or healthcare facility for newly graduated Registered Nurses. Promoting success in new nurses as they gain the expertise, impacts the safety and quality of care that our patients receive.

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