

Fostering Collaborative Partnerships

A Multisite Approach

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As a nursing professional development (NPD) leader of a multihospital system with 12 acute care hospitals, 41,000 employees, and 11,000 nurses, building and sustaining collaborative partnerships, internal, external, and interprofessional, has become increasingly crucial to achieving our organization's mission. This column will describe three innovative programs built and maintained through collaborative partnerships, facilitating our mission of partnering with our communities to build and sustain a healthier New Jersey.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS: OVERVIEW

Collaborating with colleagues, academic partners, and other key stakeholders is embedded in the roles and responsibilities of the NPD practitioner (Harper & Maloney, 2022). NPD practitioners play a crucial role in fostering relationships that bridge the gap between theory and practical application, facilitating critical thinking among students and staff. According to Harper and Maloney (2022), the components of NPD practice, such as roles and responsibilities, are interconnected to elevate nursing practice and achieve quality outcomes, with organizational mission and vision being central. At RWJBarnabas Health, an academic

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health system, our vision is to be the premier healthcare destination, providing patient-centered, high-quality academic medicine compassionately and equitably while delivering a best-in-class work experience to every member of the team.

Fulfilling this mission and vision can only be accomplished by our NPD teams working collaboratively with internal and external partners throughout a professional nurse's career development. From student to professional nurse, in any interprofessional practice environment, the roles of the NPD practitioner as learning facilitator, change agent, mentor, leader, champion for inquiry, advocate for the NPD specialty, and partner for practice transitions are interwoven (Harper & Maloney, 2022).

Empowering students throughout their educational journey and guiding our future nurses as they transition from student to professional nurse is essential to delivering safe and effective care. As the nursing profession experiences unprecedented changes, especially for new clinicians transitioning from their education into professional practice, collaborative partnerships between academia and practice become increasingly more important. According to ECRI (2024), formerly known as the Emergency Care Research Institute, this transition has emerged as the number one patient safety challenge, underscoring the critical need for effective support systems and development programs.

One of the roles of an NPD practitioner, "partner for practice transition," is to sustain and support nurses while they face balancing a challenging work environment. When that balance is not supported consistently and innovatively, turnover increases. According to the 2024 NSI National Health Care Retention & RN Staffing Report published by NSI Nursing Solutions, Inc, the RN turnover rate in 2023 was 18.4%; the average cost of turnover for a

bedside RN is \$56,300, a 7.5% increase, resulting in the typical hospital losing between \$3.9 and \$5.8 million in a year.

SOLUTIONS

To effectively prepare nursing students for a successful career, solutions must focus on setting realistic expectations and equipping them to thrive in the current healthcare landscape. In addition, solutions should address clinical practice, skill, and assessment proficiency. Once in the role of professional nurse, it is essential to provide ongoing collaboration and support through a structured plan that includes mentorship and professional development. The NPD practitioner also supports experienced nurses advancing into a new clinical specialty and beyond.

RWJBarnabas Health has created innovative methods to incorporate self-identification of professional development needs, multimodal teaching and learning opportunities, and integration of evidence-based practice to build confidence and increase competence and comfort for the new nurse. Collaborating with our academic partners, in addition to the traditional placement for clinical rotations, we offer student nurse externships and a Senior Immersion Program with dedicated education units, which aid and support the student to flourish in their future role as a professional nurse.

RWJBarnabas Health offers nursing students who have had two clinical rotations the opportunity to participate in a paid student nurse externship. The student nurse externship program offers nursing students the chance to gain hands-on experience in our various hospitals under the supervision of registered nurse (RN) preceptors. This 8- to 10-week program during the summer months is designed to bridge the gap between classroom education and real-world clinical practice, enhancing students' skills and confidence. During the program, externs work under the direction of RN preceptors to identify patient needs, plan and deliver interdisciplinary care, and perform basic clinical skills safely and competently with the NPD practitioner as a learning facilitator.

RWJBarnabas Health collaborates with nursing school faculty to provide enhanced opportunities for students through the Senior Immersion Program, which allows unique experiences in specialty areas that are not routinely part of students' curriculum. Senior nursing students are paired with an RN preceptor, who teaches and coaches them in a specialty area that they are interested in working in upon graduation, such as the operating room and the cardiac catheterization lab. This Senior Immersion Program collaborates with internal experts and academic partners to ignite nursing students' passion for a specialty area.

RWJBarnabas Health also offers a standardized orientation program, which includes foundations of nursing for

the specialty areas, such as medical/surgical, emergency, operating room, critical care, perinatal, and neonatal nursing, to name a few. These programs are tailored to address the specific challenges of certain environments, using simulation, classroom instruction, case studies, and supervised hands-on experiences. They are delivered in collaboration with leaders, infection preventionists, physical therapists, pharmacists, wound/ostomy specialists, and employee assistance specialists. An integral aspect of these programs is the focus on well-being through our collaborative partnership with our Employee Assistance Program. The Employee Assistance Program provides education and support in the areas of stress management, creating a healthy work-life balance, and communication skills.

Finally, new graduates and tenured nurses are encouraged to strengthen their spirit of inquiry through the Nursing Research Council, chaired by a system NPD practitioner. Inquiry is facilitated in collaboration with an academic partner to create a positive and supportive environment for quality improvement, evidence-based practice, and research (Harper & Maloney, 2022).

CONCLUSION

With increasing demands on the NPD practitioner and the intensity of the interprofessional learning and practice environment, it is more important than ever to integrate innovative solutions that leverage collaborative partnerships, both internally and externally. The seven roles and six responsibilities (Warren & Harper, 2017) of our NPD practitioners propel them to create a positive and healthy environment for both novice and experienced nurses by leveraging collaborative partnerships through academic-practice relationships as well as interprofessional education and simulation. The NPD practitioner collaborates with key stakeholders across the experience spectrum from supporting those on the trajectory of becoming a professional nurse to amplifying the competencies to advance the experienced nurse and enhance the quality of care they deliver as a team member.

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