

Nurse Mentoring: Creating a Professional Legacy

Experienced nurses everywhere have the opportunity to become mentors for other nurses. Mentoring another nurse is a professional means of passing along knowledge, skills, behaviors and values to a less experienced individual who is often referred to as the “mentee” or “protégé” (NLN, 2006). In a positive sense, the act of mentoring gives nurses an opportunity to create a legacy. A legacy is a bequest or a gift to others. The gift need not be tangible. By sharing information and insights with members of their own profession, experienced nurses can enable others to maximize their potential thereby improving patient care and ultimately strengthening the profession of nursing (Henk, 2005).

Mentoring entails the formation of a relationship or partnership between the mentor and the mentee. A foundation of trust between both partners is the key to a successful mentor-mentee relationship. Each partner must be willing to devote time and energy to the mentoring process. The mentor acts as a “role model and advocate to pass on life experiences and knowledge in order to motivate, support and enhance the mentee’s personal and career development.” (Kuhl, 2005) A good mentor has leadership experience, is available and responsive, believes in the capabilities of the mentee, has vision, knows how to access professional networks and seeks to enhance political awareness (Escobio, 2005). A mentor is a talented nurse who is willing to share expertise and organizational insight in

order to prepare the mentee for greater performance, productivity or achievement in the future (Henk, 2005).

The mentee is a nurse with a desire to learn, a capacity to accept constructive feedback and coaching, an ability to identify personal and professional career goals, and a willingness to take risks. The mentee exhibits a desire for job success and seeks challenging assignments and new responsibilities. The mentee actively seeks the advice and counsel of an experienced nurse mentor.

Both nursing and developmental theories support nurse mentoring as an opportunity for creating a professional legacy. Patricia Benner's theoretical framework of "novice to expert" is an excellent example of a model whereby novice nurses could greatly benefit from the knowledge and wisdom of a "proficient" or "expert" nurse mentor. (Benner, 2001) Erik Erickson is a psychologist and psychoanalyst who described eight psychosocial stages of development. In this developmental model, the tasks ascribed to the middle years from 25-64 are to produce and nurture the next generation (Kozier et al., 2004). This model is also applicable to experienced nurse mentors who seek to help mentees through socialization and by offering encouragement and support. The ultimate goal of nurse mentors should be to leave a legacy for the future by moving others up the ladder of professional success.

Opportunities for nurse mentoring can be found in all areas of nursing --- practice, education, administration and research. The clinical practice setting provides an excellent arena for an experienced nurse to share nursing insights with a novice nurse who is motivated to move forward quickly along the continuum from inexperienced novice to expert nurse. The astute novice nurse who is seeking ways to improve technical skills, work more efficiently and manage the care of several patients simultaneously will actively pursue an experienced nurse to serve as a mentor. At this elementary stage, the quest for competency is also focused on greater refinement of skills dealing with all aspects of the nursing process --- assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation and evaluation. The specific area of clinical practice in which the mentor and mentee are employed is inconsequential to the mentoring process. It is the relationship between the mentor and the mentee which matters most in determining the chances for a successful outcome. One measure of that success is exhibited when the mentee demonstrates self-efficacy in performing the role and functions of a clinical nurse independently.

Education is another area where mentors can make a lasting impact on the professional growth and development of a mentee. Novice educators have much to learn about utilizing adult learning theory when conducting their classes, planning courses and programs, conducting needs assessments, developing goal statements and learning objectives, designing curriculums, assessing competencies, evaluating learning outcomes and other duties related to their job

descriptions. The nurse mentor is able to demonstrate the tremendous variety that the position of educator or staff developer offers by modeling the role in an exemplary manner. Having a mentor to share ideas with helps the mentee to gain the skills and self-confidence necessary to excel in the educational role.

Nursing administration is rife with possibilities for nurse mentor-mentee relationships. Navigating the intricacies of the politics involved in health care management, evaluating staffing ratios, honing negotiating skills, managing human and fiscal resources, networking, strategic planning, continuous quality improvement and a host of other administrative skills should be passed on as a nurse mentor grooms a mentee to become a strong leader. The leadership position of nurse administrators affords them the opportunity to teach mentees ways in which to become better advocates for nurses and the nursing profession.

A nurse mentor in research can open the eyes of a novice researcher to a world of possibilities --- for discoveries in clinical nursing at the bedside, for funding possibilities, for grant writing, and for publication. Adding to the knowledge base of the profession through nursing research, theory development or theory testing are excellent ways in which a nurse mentor can guide a mentee. Leading the way, providing guidance or support with projects, offering advice, reviewing plans or methodologies, ways in which to best collaborate with others and formulate partnerships are all essential components of the gifts which a nurse mentor in research can share with a mentee.

Experienced nurses should not hesitate to enrich their lives and the lives of other nurses through mentoring. It is a reciprocal relationship which can be an extremely fulfilling to both the nurse mentor and the mentee. Mentoring presents a golden opportunity for experienced nurses to reap intrinsic rewards as they witness the growth and development of other nurses based on a legacy which they themselves have created.

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