Background

Professionalism in a workplace results in a positive work culture with increased staff satisfaction. Registered nurses demonstrate professionalism through positive workplace performance and behaviour which has a flow on effect to increasing positive patient outcomes. To help nurses develop an understanding of what constitutes correct professional behaviour support of staff through role modelling and mentoring programs has been shown to be successful. Research has shown that with support there is an improved staff morale, increased professional growth, job satisfaction and retention of staff. 1,10

To increase retention, the health industry is looking to find ways to increase job satisfaction and reduce attrition of staff as the projected forthcoming shortage of Registered nurses, is an estimated 123,000 shortfall in 2030 in Australia; 7 therefore the development of programs which support and encourage retention are essential.

Methods

Design Qualitative study using a narrative inquiry approach.

Sample Registered nurses working at a level three and above; currently registered; working in leadership roles in acute care hospitals in Perth.

Ethics approval obtained University and acute care hospitals involved gave approval for study.

Recruitment All staff of level three and above were invited to participate by email giving study details and the researchers contact information. Participants phoned or emailed volunteering to be part of study.

Interviews Twelve participants were interviewed and recorded following consent forms being signed.

Analysis The interview transcriptions were analysed looking for repeating patterns of information. These were then identified and grouped together to form categories, then further analysed and considered, and combined to form themes.

Four themes emerged from the data:

Professional Presence; Walk the Walk; Owning the problem; Bridge over troubled waters.

Findings

As identified from the stories of the twelve leaders, the researcher developed the narrative of professionalism which discussed the key attributes of professionalism and the influences on the professionalism of the Registered nurse in the acute care setting.

From the second theme ‘walk the walk’ the key attribute of role modelling and mentoring was identified by nurse leaders as essential to be demonstrated by all nurses.

Role modelling was important to nurse leaders. They felt that setting an example through professional interaction with both colleagues and patients, was an essential means of developing desired behaviour in other staff and thereby increasing their level of professionalism.

Mentoring of other staff was discussed by nurse leaders as assisting the new nurse in negotiating the organisational systems; in understanding their professional role within the multidisciplinary health team; together with assistance in improving the nurses professional development. Mentoring provided support for the nurse by having a ‘go to’ person to help them negotiate both the overt and covert elements of the new environment in which they were working. The importance of being able to discuss patient information without fear of ridicule 3 is an important aspect of improving patient safety. Feeling supported through the allocation of a mentor with whom they can freely discuss any work-related issues without fear of recrimination increases the confidence of all staff to have open discussions about any professional or patient issues.

Implications: This research study purports that with formalised ongoing peer to peer mentoring programs for all levels of staff, positive individual and organisational outcomes will be supported. Linking staff through peer to peer mentoring can also reduce workplace incivility through creating a network of support, resulting in increased job satisfaction and retention of staff. This action will also lead to the development of a community of practice thereby increasing collegiality, professionalism, organisational commitment, staff morale and retention.

Key References: