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Applying Evidence-Based Practice to Advance Leadership in Practice Among Graduate Nursing Students

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Evidence-based practice (EBP) is a cornerstone of advanced practice nursing. As such, it is important to provide graduate students with an opportunity to gain experience and develop the needed leadership skill set to promote the evidence that leads to best practices. A suburban collegiate setting has been fostering the use of EBP by requiring 3 sequential semesters of coursework that takes a student from gaining knowledge about EBP in a blended format consisting of faculty led lecture, class discussion, and on-line learning modules to project planning, implementation and evaluation. The last semester culminates with project dissemination. Students work with course faculty, preceptors, an assigned mentor/reader and numerous stakeholders along the way. Projects to date have been designed, implemented and evaluated in primary care clinical settings and community agencies that have a mutually agreed upon problem area that negatively impacts optimum outcomes for patients or the organizational setting. A project can also focus on a content area within the graduate curriculum that is either new or requires revision. All students follow an EBP Model in their role as the “leader or champion” and develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills. Leadership skills are used throughout the entire project process to bring about transformative change and positive outcomes in the project setting. Student involvement in such a project is supported by the *Master’s Essentials of Nursing* (AACN, 2011). As noted in the Essentials, graduate education should prepare students to “lead change to provide quality outcomes” (p. 3) and to “translate evidence into practice” (p. 4). The specific Essentials that are met throughout the capstone project experience include II, IV, and IX. For example, students adopt a leadership role in conducting environment and stakeholder assessments, adopt a change agent role and influence outcomes at a systems level. Exemplars of student projects in both education and practice highlight the application of EBP to advance quality outcomes in advanced practice nurse education and practice. Lessons learned from the past five years of offering the three course sequence within the graduate curriculum will be shared.

Title:

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References:

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Abstract Summary:

Graduate students need a firm knowledge and application of evidence-based practice (EBP) and research in order to promote positive outcomes in patient populations and healthcare practice settings. A capstone project can provide them with the opportunity to advance their leadership skills through project development, implementation and evaluation.

Content Outline:

I. EBP process and advanced practice nursing

- a. developing a knowledge base
- b. assuming a leadership role
- c. *Master's Essentials* support

II. Exemplars

- a. education
- b. practice

III. Conclusion

- a. lessons learned

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Author Summary: Dr. Byrne is Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of Nursing, The College of New Jersey. She teaches Evidence-based Practice, Capstone Seminar and Project at the graduate level and Perspectives in Global Health at the undergraduate level. Sharon coordinates the study abroad program for her school and is a volunteer advance practice nurse provider in Haiti. She is Past President of Delta Nu, current Secretary for Tri-State Consortium and a Virginia Henderson Fellow.