The Mentoring Experiences of Adjunct Nursing Faculty: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Background: The nursing faculty shortage is threatening health care’s infrastructure at a time when the shortage of nurses is at critical levels. To fill many of the vacant faculty positions, schools of nursing are increasingly hiring adjunct instructors. However, many adjunct nursing faculty members are expert clinicians but novice teachers who face numerous difficulties transitioning to the faculty role. Mentoring is widely cited as a strategy to assist in this transition, but limited research explores the mentoring experiences of these instructors.

Purpose: This study explored the lived mentoring experiences of adjunct nursing faculty in undergraduate nursing programs.

Philosophical Underpinnings: A transcendental phenomenological qualitative approach was guided by the interpretivist paradigm to gain an understanding of the lived mentoring experiences of adjunct nursing instructors.

Methods: The target population was adjunct nursing faculty who teach students in undergraduate nursing programs. Purposive and snowball sampling were used, and data analysis was guided by Moustakas’s (1994) transcendental phenomenology.

Results: From 20 adjunct nursing faculty members three themes and two sub-themes emerged: Transferring, Transitioning (Sub-themes: Lacking Orientation and Lacking Mentorship) and Transforming. Adjunct nursing faculty are highly motivated to transfer their extensive knowledge and clinical experiences to students. However, many of these instructors are experienced clinicians but novice teachers who experience role ambiguity, frustration, anxiety and confusion and lacked orientation and mentoring opportunities as they transition to the nurse educator’s role. The results of this study found that adjunct nurse educators value mentoring, however in the absence of support they learned how to teach by seeking out mentoring opportunities among peers. They also utilized prior personal and professional experiences as a foundation for knowledge. Transforming to the adjunct nursing faculty role occurred over a period as the participants became more confident in their teaching abilities and eventually their identities as nurse educators evolved. Interestingly, the participants were empowered to become mentors to others and in some way, provide a positive mentoring experience that they themselves did not receive. The contribution of this unique group of educators who were part of this study is invaluable as they gave a voice to adjunct nursing faculty who educate the next generation of nurses.

Conclusions: This study revealed that adjunct nursing faculty members are motivated to transfer their nursing knowledge and experience to the next generation of nurses. However, they face many challenges in transitioning from the clinician’s role to the adjunct nursing faculty’s role. This study supports the need for robust mentoring and orientation programs to transform this underrepresented group of instructors into successful nurse educators.

Title:
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**Abstract Summary:**

This dissertation research study explored the mentoring experiences of adjunct nursing faculty members in undergraduate nursing programs. The results indicate that adjunct instructors are expert clinicians but novice teachers who need mentoring and guidance as they transition from the practice settings to academia.

**Content Outline:**

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Author Summary: This author has worked as a registered nurse for many years as telemetry/medical surgical nurse, as well as adjunct nursing faculty in both associate and baccalaureate nursing programs. As a novice nursing faculty the transition from the bedside to academia was very stressful without consistent guidance and mentoring. As a full time faculty member, this author had access to informal mentors who were instrumental in the career development of this author.