

## Creating Healthy Work Environments 2019

### Application of AACN Healthy Work Environment Standards to Launch a Clinical Research Partnership

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#### Overview:

Effective academic and clinical partnerships are essential for successful research and uninterrupted care. A perceived lack of time is a well-documented concern among clinicians (6) as are knowledge gaps surrounding research opportunities (1). No guidance exists for building these partnerships; rather, teams rely on group norms and the social skills of individual members to set/maintain the culture. This abstract highlights how our team applied the AACN Healthy Work Environment Standards during the successful launch of a new academic-clinical partnership consisting of researchers, scientists, nurses, doctors, other clinicians, and student trainees.

#### AACN Healthy Work Environment:

##### Effective Decision Making

Effective decision making and the involvement of stakeholders (outlined below) during the planning/launching of the study was critical. *Key Investigators:* Communication between the principal investigator (PI) and senior clinicians began prior to study conceptualization. These individuals also collaborated on key study details (e.g. inclusion/exclusion criteria) and logistics.

- *Students:* The PI reviewed hospital registry data with the students and related it to the study's inclusion/exclusion criteria. Students were individually trained and evaluated by skilled screeners.

##### Skilled Communication

- *Nurses:* The research team followed up directly with the on-unit leadership (e.g. nurse manager; nurse educator) requesting discussion of our study at weekly staff meetings to prepare staff for our presence.
- *Other Clinicians:* Our team met with unit leadership about the study goals/workflow. The blood draw form was streamlined to reduce superfluous information and clinician burden.  
*Students:* Communication of study goals and student responsibilities was accomplished using standard methods (e.g. emails, meetings) and technology (e.g. continuously updated Google Sites; a video with interactive questions to teach HIPAA requirements; task management apps).

##### True Collaboration

- *Researchers/Academicians:* The PI endeavours to embody true collaboration in all aspects of the study (e.g. screening, freezer de-icing).

- **Nurses:** A study of nurses in Australia found that many feel their assistance in research would be invaluable; however they perceived insufficiency of knowledge on involvement in research (1). Nurses should be encouraged to describe the study goals so they will understand how their contributions may help improve patient care through evidence-based practice (1, 2, 3). In launching the study, the PI shared with the unit the study goals and support of the nursing research department. The PI highlighted opportunities for mentorship from a PhD prepared nurse scientist (3, 4). In past studies, this increased nurse participation by allowing for education in terms understood by nurses and generating inspiration and respect for the nurse with a more advanced education level (3, 4).
- **Students:** Involvement of undergraduate students in research is challenging but offers practical advantages in addition to enhancing their training. As students engage in clinical and academic culture, they grow as future contributors (9). Faculty research sparks interest in mentees and sets an example for how to address challenging situations (9). In our study, students are encouraged to assume leadership positions including: giving tours of research facilities, creating lab-specific HIPAA training, and role modeling inter-professional communication. This increases student self-efficacy, allows the PI to focus on tasks beyond the undergraduate scope, and reduces clinician burden (9). Including students from several disciplines enriches studies (9). Key to success is promotion of student independence whenever possible, including the conceptualization, writing, and editing of this abstract.

#### Appropriate Staffing

- **Principal Investigator:** The principal investigator is ultimately responsible for ensuring successful study execution. The PI and her mentor discussed strategies to maximize screening effectiveness; essentially, this requires the PI being on call 24/7 with support.
- **Students:** Screening the EHR for potential participants must occur 24/7. This is the responsibility of the PI, either by hiring clinical research coordinators and/or utilizing trained volunteers. The clinical research partnership described here was accomplished with the support of modest pilot funds, necessitating reliance on volunteers. Involvement of established team members in thoroughly orienting of new members facilitates exponential growth while minimizing PI burden.
- **Nurses and Other Clinicians:** Reliance on student volunteers for orientation minimizes the burden on clinical staff. When clinical staff involvement is required, the study team initially contacts the participant's primary nurse and will reach out to the charge nurse if additional help is required.

#### Meaningful Recognition

- **Clinicians:** To express our gratitude, staff are acknowledged (2) using hand-written thank you letters. Students with a knack for baking were solicited to bring the unit treats to express gratitude. Additionally, clinical staff are updated frequently on study progress to maintain their enthusiasm and emphasize our appreciation for their help in making the study possible (7). In addition, the PI was inspired by a mentor to formally acknowledge the effort of unit nurses in the form of a letter to the hospital's Director of Nursing.
- **Students:** The team formally recognizes students in several small ways to promote camaraderie. Each week, a student is chosen as mentee of the week (Monday) or rising star (Wednesday) and their accomplishments are highlighted. This validates their efforts and inspires other students to become leaders. Student leads on key study activities have been identified and provide reports at team meetings. When feasible, the PI treats her team to happy hour or lunch to show appreciation for their efforts.

#### Authentic Leadership

- The most fundamental, yet challenging, component of launching a new academic-clinical partnership is consistently displaying authentic leadership. Essential skills include project management, delegation, and skilled communication between stakeholders. Self awareness/transparency about personal limitations and issues encountered, as well as effective communication of this information, has proven critical. Involving students facilitates development of their own authentic leadership skills. Public engagement efforts are critical, motivating the PI to present the study outside of professional conferences to increase awareness about nursing research. The PI presented at the Sigma Theta Tau International Epsilon Theta Research Dinner about nursing research and the various ways nurses can be involved. There are many misconceptions about nursing research, but these can be overcome with authentic leadership and public outreach.

**Summary:** In fast paced, acute settings, nurses and other clinicians have expressed concern that involvement in research will interfere with care (5). It is essential that clinicians are assured that patient care comes first and missing research enrollment is preferable to compromising patient care. The most common push back is the perceived lack of time to do research (6) leading us to strategically minimize clinician burden. Additionally, absence of incentive or reward for nurses to do research is a common complaint (6). Our under-funded study operationalized our gratitude with verbal appreciation, handwritten thank you cards, and treats. If additional funding is generated, IRB approval will be pursued to formally acknowledge nurses for their efforts (e.g. gift cards). Effective communication among team members, innovative use of technology, and demonstration of authentic leadership are critical to launching successful academic-clinical partnerships and training students to be the next generation of leaders.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

AACN Healthy Work Environment, Academic-clinical partnership and Clinical research

**References:**

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### **Abstract Summary:**

Effective academic-clinical partnerships are unique to each team's social dynamic, yet essential for successful research. Many clinicians perceive a lack of time for research and insufficiency of research opportunities. This abstract highlights how our team applied the AACN Healthy Work Environment Standards to launch a successful academic-clinical partnership.

### **Content Outline:**

- Overview of the project and its goals:
  - The first author is a new principal investigator (PI) seeking to launch a successful clinical-research partnership.
  - The ultimate goal is to facilitate enrollment of pediatric patients into a biological bank, which requires buy-in from all relevant stakeholders at both the academic institution and clinical site.
  - To achieve this goal the PI's team applied the AACN healthy work environment standards.
- Overview of this presentation:
  - The purpose of this presentation is to describe how the AACN healthy work environment standards apply to a clinical-academic research partnerships.
  - We provide specific examples of how our laboratory applied the principles to promote a positive experience for all team members and stakeholders.
  - Our goal is to help others learn from our teams successes and victories and inspire others to implement the AACN healthy work environment standards to their own clinical research projects.
- Effective decision making is a critical, especially early in the study planning and execution phases.
  - Effective decision making is the process of making, directing, evaluating, and leading organizational operations.
  - The use of effective decision making between the principal investigator and senior clinicians before study conceptualization allowed for the ease of launching the study.
    - While this is critical in the early stages of study planning, ongoing evaluation is also important in that it enables tracking of progress and making incremental improvements.
    - Involvement of studies facilitates role modeling of effective decision making and collaboration.
- Skilled Communication must occur throughout the study and can be strengthened through thoughtful use of technology.
  - Skilled communication is defined by the AACN to be a "two-way dialogue in which individuals think and decided together."
  - Our study incorporates skilled communication between students, nurses, and other clinicians in many ways.
    - Traditional methods include weekly team meetings, one-on-one meetings, and the use of emails.
    - High-tech methods include the use of Google Sites for continuous updates of important study information and other technological platforms (e.g. Airtable; Slack) to facilitate rapid knowledge sharing in a way that is more easily searchable than meeting minutes and emails.
  - The importance of skilled communication promotes continual personal growth, while eliminating negative conditions of the work environment such as stress, mistrust, and dissatisfaction.

- True collaboration empowers the PI, clinicians, and student volunteers to contribute in meaningful ways to the study.
  - True collaboration involves the respect of “the unique knowledge and abilities of each professional” so that each individual can harness their skills into a meaningful contribution toward shared goals.
  - True collaboration is incorporated in all aspects of our study.
    - The PI contributes to all aspects of the study and provides regular feedback to team members.
    - Clinicians are looked up to as experts who can provide key insights into the patient population and clinical site operations.
    - Students are encouraged to take on various leadership positions available, ranging from giving tours of research facilities to role modeling inter-professional communication.
- Appropriate staffing is critical not only to identify potential cases but also minimize burden for all team members.
  - Appropriate staffing is needed in a healthy work environment to minimize burden for all members of the team.
  - The PI ensures appropriate staffing by recruiting an adequate pool of volunteers.
  - To further maximize study success the PI is on call 24/7.
  - Student volunteers primarily screen for potential participants and orient new team members.
  - This limits the burden on the PI and clinical staff unless additional help is needed.
- Meaningful recognition maintains morale and fosters camaraderie.
  - Meaningful recognition is essential in a healthy work environment because it reinforces active contributions.
  - Within our study, students are recognized every week as a mentee of the week (Mondays) or rising star (Wednesdays) for their accomplishments.
  - Clinicians are also valued for their contribution to our study and receive evidence in the form of handwritten thank you letters and baked goods.
  - The ongoing process of meaningful recognition provides a sustainable work environment by bringing out the value of each team member individually.
- Authentic leadership is complex but important and can be achieved by role modeling professional behavior and engaging the public.
  - Authentic leadership is demonstrated by nurse leaders who “fully embrace the concept of a healthy work environment and engage others in achieving it.”
  - The use of public engagement is important in displaying authentic leadership in our study to increase awareness about nursing research.
- Conclusion
  - The AACN Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments is a great resource for not only traditional of clinical nursing, but also academic clinical research partnerships.

First Primary Presenting Author

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**Professional Experience:** Dr. Osier is the principal investigator on the clinical-academic partnership in question. PhD prepared nurse who is a new faculty member at University of Texas at Austin.

**Author Summary:** Dr. Osier is an Assistant Professor with joint appointments in the School of Nursing (Division of Holistic Adult Health) and Dell Medical School (Department of Neurology). Dr. Osier is the

Director of the Biobehavioral Core of St. David's Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Research in Underserved Populations (CHPR). Dr. Osier's program of research uses both pre-clinical and clinical research to promote understanding the molecular and genomic underpinnings of health, disease, and injury recovery.

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**Professional Experience:** Bailey Snow is a member of Dr. Osier's research team and has made essential contributions to implementing the AACN healthy work environment standards into our clinical-academic research partnership.

**Author Summary:** Bailey Snow is a pre-licensure nursing student. She is employed in the principal investigators laboratory and is also a clinical assistant in the float pool at the local hospital.

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**Professional Experience:** Claire Slote is a member of Dr. Osier's research team and has made essential contributions to implementing the AACN healthy work environment standards into our clinical-academic research partnership.

**Author Summary:** Claire is a senior nursing student working with Dr. Osier. In addition to being employed in Dr. Osier's laboratory she works in the skills laboratory and as a nurse intern.

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**Professional Experience:** Mindy Nguyen is a member of Dr. Osier's research team and has made essential contributions to implementing the AACN healthy work environment standards into our clinical-academic research partnership.

**Author Summary:** Mindy Nguyen is a neuroscience major who is minoring in forensics. She is in the prestigious University Leadership Network program at the University of Texas at Austin.

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**Professional Experience:** Catherine Zhang is a member of Dr. Osier's research team and has made

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**Author Summary:** Catherine Zhang is a high school student. She is a volunteer in the principal investigators laboratory and is also a clinical assistant in the float pool at the local hospital.