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Background

Recruitment and retention of healthcare providers to rural environments is critical in order to meet the needs of individuals living in those communities and optimize patient outcomes. Rural providers face a number of challenges including minimal access to resources and technology, a diverse scope of practice, and limited opportunities for professional development. Rural healthcare providers often work alone and are unsupported in caring for patients, which can lead to job dissatisfaction, turnover, and lack of continuity of care for rural residents (Rohatinsky & Jahner, 2016).

Mentorship is one strategy known to improve recruitment and retention through professional growth and development in rural areas (Bourke, Waite, & Wright, 2014). Mentorship can be defined as a mutually beneficial, non-evaluative relationship between a more experienced person (mentor) and a less experienced person (mentee). Mentorship assists with professional development, confidence, competence, and decision making (Jarrell, 2016; Weese, Jakubik, Eliades, & Huth, 2015; Zhang, Qian, Wu, Wen, & Zhang, 2016). Mentorship is also positively correlated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which translates into increased retention of healthcare workers (Zhang et al., 2016).

Mentoring relationships in rural areas offer opportunities to promote professional well-being of healthcare providers and optimize patient outcomes. The rural healthcare environment can be drastically different than working in urban areas and the literature remains limited with regards to rural healthcare provider and senior leader perceptions of required resources and supports to foster and sustain mentorships in rural healthcare environments.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to better understand what healthcare providers and senior leaders value in mentorship and determine the best way to implement a mentorship program in rural western Canada. The research questions addressed within this presentation are: i) What are the perceptions of healthcare providers and individuals in senior leaderships positions of same-profession mentorships in rural regions?; and ii) What factors and practices influence the development and sustainability of rural mentorships?

Methods

Healthcare providers and senior leaders were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling from within a rural health region in Canada. The health region serves a population of 44,576 people and a geographical area of 41,770 km². The largest community within the region has a population of 5,000. Participants included healthcare providers (registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and physicians), senior administrators, and front-line managers. These individuals were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide and data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
Results

Two themes of rural mentorship were derived from the interviews and were described as challenges and facilitators. Challenges were comprised of three categories including administrative, scope of practice, and interpersonal challenges. Facilitators were divided into four categories and included mentorship as a recruitment and retention tool, openness and commitment to mentorship, structured mentorship programs, and community influence on mentorship.

Implications for Nursing Administration and Practice

In order for successful rural mentorships to occur, mentorship initiatives need to be supported by all members of the organization including senior leaders, managers, clinical educators, and healthcare providers. While senior leaders, managers, and educators provide the foundation and supports necessary for mentorship to become a reality, the onus on and commitment of the providers involved is essential as well (Weese et al., 2015). In this presentation, strategies will be discussed to encourage mentorship commitment from employees at all levels within the organization.

Conclusion

Information provided within this presentation will allow administrators and healthcare providers to gain greater insight into implementing successful mentorship programs within rural environments. Healthcare provider professional development, recruitment, and retention can become a reality by supporting rural mentorship opportunities. Ultimately, positive patient outcomes can result from having adequate numbers of engaged and supported providers working in rural areas.

Title:
Optimizing Professional Well-Being and Patient Outcomes Through the Use of Mentorship in Rural Workplaces

Keywords:
Mentorship, Professional Development and Rural

References:


Abstract Summary:
This presentation explores the mentorship perceptions of rural healthcare providers and senior administrators within a health region in Canada. Information will be provided on the key challenges and facilitators in developing and supporting mentorship opportunities for healthcare providers working in rural areas.

Content Outline:
Introduction

- Recruitment and retention of healthcare providers to rural areas is critical to meet needs of patients and optimize patient outcomes.
- Rural providers face numerous challenges while working in rural areas.
- These challenges can lead to job dissatisfaction and turnover.
- Mentorship is a strategy to improve recruitment and retention through professional growth and development.
- By engaging in mentoring relationships, providers can have their well-being supported as well as their patients' well-being.
- There is not a lot of literature with regards to rural healthcare provider and senior leader perceptions of required resources and supports to foster and sustain mentorships in rural healthcare environments.

Explanation of the Research Project

- The purpose of this project was to better understand what healthcare providers and senior leaders value in mentorship and determine the best way to implement a mentorship program in rural western Canada. The research questions addressed within this presentation are: i) What are the perceptions of healthcare providers and individuals in senior leadership positions of same-profession mentorships in rural regions?; and ii) What factors and practices influence the development and sustainability of rural mentorships?

- Methods
  - Healthcare providers and senior leaders were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling from within a rural health region in Canada.
  - The health region serves a population of 44,576 people and a geographical area of 41,770 km². The largest community within the region has a population of 5,000.
  - Participants included healthcare providers (registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and physicians), senior administrators, and front-line managers.
  - These individuals were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide and data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

- Results
  - Two themes of rural mentorship were derived from the interviews and were described as challenges and facilitators.
  - Challenges were comprised of three categories including administrative, scope of practice, and interpersonal challenges.
  - Facilitators were divided into four categories and included mentorship as a recruitment and retention tool, openness and commitment to mentorship, structured mentorship programs, and community influence on mentorship.

Implications for Nursing Administration and Practice
• All members of the organization need to be involved in and committed to membership in order for it to be successful including senior leaders, managers, clinical educators, and healthcare providers.
• Discuss strategies to encourage mentorship commitment from employees at all levels within the organization (senior leaders, managers, clinical educators, healthcare providers).

Conclusion

• Greater insight gained into implementing successful mentorship programs within rural environments.
• Healthcare provider professional development, recruitment, and retention can become a reality by supporting rural mentorship opportunities.
• Ultimately, positive patient outcomes can result from having adequate numbers of engaged and supported providers working in rural areas.

First Primary Presenting Author

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Author Summary: Noelle Rohatinsky is an Associate Professor at the College of Nursing, University of Saskatchewan, in Saskatoon, Canada. Noelle's program of research focuses on transition of healthcare providers and students to their work environments and assisting clients with their transition in being diagnosed with chronic illnesses and self-managing their conditions.

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