Creating Healthy Work Environments 2019

An Academic-Practice Collaboration to Improve a Critical Care Work Environment

Lynn Greenleaf Brown, DNP, RN-BC, CNE
School of Nursing, Auburn University, Auburn, AL, USA
Tanya L. Johnson, MSN, RN, NE-BC
137 Miller Hall, Auburn University School of Nursing, Auburn, AL, USA
Libba McMillan, PhD, RN
School of Nursing, Auburn University School of Nursing, Auburn University, Alabama, AL, USA

The nursing shortage coupled with the aging population and high patient acuity results in an increased demand for quality nursing care and services. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing reports 55% of the RN workforce is age 50 or older and eligible for retirement in 10 -15 years. In addition, many nurses are leaving the profession or habitually changing jobs due to difficult working conditions and dissatisfying work environments. An estimated 30% - 50% of all new graduate RN’s either exit the profession completely or change jobs within the first 3 years of practice. The average turnover rate in 2014 was 17.2%, an increase from 13.5% in 2011. Nurses’ decisions to leave a hospital or nursing practice are influenced by both interdependent professional and personal factors. Ineffective work relationships, high patient acuity, heavy workloads, and absence of leadership support are among the reasons nurses feel frustrated and dissatisfied. Recruitment efforts, orientation resources, and decreased unit morale are additional problems associated with turnover.

Decreasing nurse turnover has a positive impact on patient outcomes. Adequate nurse staffing leads to decreased adverse events related to patient care. Missed nursing care, which is substantially related to nurse staffing, correlates with an increased odds of patients dying after common surgical procedures. An increase in a nurse’s workload by one patient and a 10% increase in the percent of missed nursing care were associated with a 7% and 16% increase of the patient dying within 30 days of admission.

Work environment is a principal element affecting RN turnover in nursing units. Understanding work conditions allows hospital administrators to increase job satisfaction and intent to stay. Evaluating workload, staffing levels, flexibility of scheduling, and relationships between staff nurses, physicians, and managers can cultivate a supportive environment. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the benefits of academic-practice collaboration when identifying root causes of nurse turnover and developing sustainable solutions in a critical care unit.

The director of critical care at a local hospital sought counsel related to high turnover rates from a former nursing professor. Low morale, staff burnout, the financial impact of turnover, and the desire to provide high quality care consistent with the hospital’s mission were cited as reasons for the consultation. Three nursing professors at a state university met with the nurse manager and created a survey based on evidence-based literature and input from nurse administrators. The team obtained IRB approvals from the hospital and the university. The survey contained 35 Likert scale questions. The five categories included effective leadership, staffing and resource adequacy, professional practice, meaningful recognition, and communication and collaboration. Thirty-two registered nurses of 36 completed the surveys.

Survey results provided information confirming positives and challenges, creating opportunities for improvement. A few examples related to the five themes are discussed. Survey responses suggested some members of the nursing administration team were unresponsive and inattentive to employee concerns. Nurses also voiced concerns of inappropriate workloads and lack of adequate personnel. The critical care nurses perceived adequate opportunities to serve of hospital committees and attend continuing education programs. One hundred percent of the staff agreed that coworkers are willing to help when needed, however nurses disclosed a variety of unhealthy relationships with physicians.
The professors presented the report to the chief nursing officer, critical care manager, and unit manager, as an executive summary and included an overview, color-coded graphs with explanations, recommendations, and professional evidence-based literature. The report was delivered while displaying sensitivity to feedback that was potentially negative or volatile with the intent of helping the unit and organization. The nursing professors were not involved in executing recommendations as agreed upon at the beginning of the relationship.

The nursing team took immediate action to respond to the concerns revealed in the survey. Results, recommendations, and administrative response will be discussed. For example, the survey revealed concerns related to appropriate, safe staffing. As a result, nursing administration implemented a charge nurse training course utilizing case studies and active learning strategies. This course provided needed education regarding available resources and escalation plans associated with census and acuity-based staffing guidelines. Another response to nightshift staffing concerns was providing an expert ICU nurse who would not have a patient assignment in order to educate and assist the many novice ICU nurses.

Progressive organizations understand the value of "outside eyes" and collaborative relationships to broaden the potential for improvement. The nursing professors were able to utilize their unique position to communicate staff concerns without jeopardizing relationships and job security. The professors could relate to the intensive care nurses as well as nursing management. As a result, the professors were able to analyze conflict from all perspectives and help administration understand concerns.

The nursing shortage and high attrition rates motivate nursing administrators to establish and sustain a healthy work environment. Academic-practice collaboration enhances relationships, knowledge sharing, and the potential for improvement. Assessment of intensive care units or areas with high turnover can lead to valuable information to address necessary change. An accurate survey conducted and analyzed by a third party can identify critical problems that should be a priority for nursing administration. There is utility in surveying staff and not making assumptions. Sound leadership strengthens healthy work environments, promotes growth in nursing, enhances staff morale, enriches patient care, and reduces turnover rates.

Title:
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References:
Abstract Summary:
A state university collaborated with an ICU to understand and reduce nurse turnover. Establishing and sustaining a healthy work environment must become a priority for nurse administrators and managers due to the nursing shortage and attrition rates. Results, recommendations, and advice for academia/hospital partnerships will be presented.

Content Outline:
I. Introduction - Improve Work Environment
   A. Decrease RN Turnover
   B. Effect on patient outcomes
   C. Understanding work conditions can allow administrators to increase job satisfaction and intent to stay

II. Body
   A. Scenario of nurse manager reaching out to former professor due to high turnover in a critical care ICU
   B. Survey results, recommendations, and actions focusing on decreasing turnover and improving the work environment
   C. Lessons learned from academic/practice collaboration

III. Conclusion - Academic-practice collaboration can build relationships and share expertise
   A. Nursing administrators should be proactive in establishing and sustaining healthy work environments due to the nursing shortage and high attrition rates
   B. There is utility in surveying staff and not making assumptions regarding work environments

First Primary Presenting Author
Primary Presenting Author
Lynn Greenleaf Brown, DNP, RN-BC, CNE
Auburn University
School of Nursing
Assistant Clinical Professor
Auburn AL
USA

Professional Experience: 8/2015 - Present; Assistant Clinical Professor; Auburn University 6/2009 - 7/2010; Clinical Instructor; Jefferson State Community College, Shelby 7/2014 - 7/2015; RN; UAB Hospital 8/2010 - 7/2014; Clinical Care Coordinator; UAB School of Medicine 3/2004 - 8/2010; RN; UAB Hospital 8/1989 - 8/1993; RN; Humana Hospital Huntsville 7/1988 - 6/1989; RN; University of Tennessee Medical Center 6/1984 - 7/1988; RN; Crawford Long Hospital of Emory University

Author Summary: Dr. Lynn Greenleaf Brown joined the Auburn University School of Nursing faculty in
2015. She graduated with her DNP in administration with an additional educator concentration from Samford University. She is ANCC Board Certified in Medical-Surgical Nursing and is a Certified Nurse Educator. She is a member of the American Nursing Association, the Alabama State Nurses Association, Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society, and the Alabama League for Nursing.

Second Author
Tanya L. Johnson, MSN, RN, NE-BC
Auburn University School of Nursing
Assistant Clinical Professor
Auburn, AL
USA

Professional Experience: Auburn University School of Nursing, Auburn, AL 2013 – Current Assistant Clinical Professor Nursing Leadership Course Leader, Level V Coordinator Russell Medical Center, Alexander City, Al 2005 - 2013 Director of Nursing 1996 - 2005 Director of Nursing Supervisors 1988 – 1996 Nurse Manager; Women’s Services 1977 – 1988 ED Staff RN/Nurse Manager

Author Summary: Tanya Johnson has served in a variety of leadership positions throughout her 39 years of practice. She was nurse manager in the Emergency Department, Women's Services, and Nursing Supervisor Director. She was nursing director nine years prior to joining Auburn University School of Nursing in 2013. Her responsibilities as an Assistant Clinical Professor include course leading senior level courses. Her research and teaching interest focus on healthcare management and nursing leadership at the undergraduate level.

Third Author
Libba McMillan, PhD, RN
Auburn University School of Nursing
School of Nursing
Associate Professor
Alabama AL
USA

Professional Experience: 2008-present Auburn University, Auburn Alabama Assistant Professor 2007 Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama Adjunct Faculty 2005-2007 Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama Graduate Teaching Assistant 1997-2000 University of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska Faculty 1997-2000 Weber State University, Outreach Program Clinical Instructor 1993-1997 Riverside Regional Medical Center Nursing School Clinical and Academic Instructor (ADN program) Numerous presentations at national and international conferences on working with interdisciplinary healthcare providers, county cooperative extension professionals, and civic organizations in rural communities. Recent work included spearheading a collaborative partnership experience at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. This academic-practice partnership yielded development and publishing of competencies in identification and nursing care for our nation's returning Veterans.

Author Summary: Dr. Libba McMillan is an Associate Professor at Auburn University School of Nursing. She brings diverse nursing expertise across the lifespan. She has national and international conference presentations on working with interdisciplinary healthcare providers, and civic organizations in rural communities. Recent work includes spearheading a collaborative partnership at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, which developed and published competencies for nursing care of returning Veterans and family members.