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Courageous Caring Conversations: A Pathway to Retention and Resilience

Brenda Kucirka, PhD, RN, PMHNC-BC, CNE

Mary Baumberger-Henry, PhD, RN

School of Nursing, Widener University, Chester, PA, USA

Problem Statement

The faculty shortage facing the nursing profession in the United States is becoming a problem of major proportions with a national nurse faculty vacancy rate of 7.9% (AACN, 2017). Additionally, there is a shortage of faculty available to teach aspiring nurse educators in master's and doctoral programs (AACN, 2017). In a compromising attempt to make ends meet, faculty workloads are becoming less manageable as they are accompanied by additional overload to compensate for vacancies. In some instances, there is extreme fluidity in workload with frequent changes to teaching assignments. This leaves educators struggling to find balance, barely able to stay ahead of the students as they prepare and adjust to unanticipated new teaching assignments. In addition, the climate in the classroom can be stressful with student entitlement and unrealistic expectations (Morin, 2018; Preston, S. & Boswell, S. 2015). The stress related to workload, uncertainty of roles and responsibilities, the expectation of publishing along with conducting practice hours or community service becomes difficult to manage. In this type of environment, it is easy for tempers to shorten and hostility and incivility to ensue leaving one questioning why they chose academia and whether it is really worth the effort to stay.

How do we break this cycle of overload that jeopardizes faculty retention and wellbeing? Following a qualitative grounded theory study of ethical tension in nursing academia, it was found that perhaps the cycle can be broken by improving the culture in academia through respect and caring practices that support resilience. When the environment is one where the faculty member feels respected and productive and believes that what they produce is meritorious and worthwhile they are more likely to report job satisfaction and a desire to remain in nursing education. This begins with respect for ourselves as individuals and our colleagues. The purpose of this presentation is to help faculty improve the environment in which they teach by sharing an innovative approach aimed at building a community of caring and respect to support faculty wellbeing. This approach, Courageous Caring Conversations, provides a forum for sharing difficult experiences and situations in academia as well as celebrating successes.

Implementation/Approach

Courageous Caring Conversations is an innovative strategy that can be implemented to support faculty wellbeing and resilience. This strategy is based on Boykin and Schoenhofer's theory of Nursing as Caring (2015) and a modified version of Schwartz healthcare rounds adapted for the academic setting. Through the theory of Nursing as Caring, faculty believe in a culture that supports everyone's unique being, this includes the values of: trust, hope, courage, and patience with one another. If we teach caring, then we should practice caring.

The Schwartz rounds were developed in 1995 and became an alternative to medical rounds; they are currently employed in more than 440 healthcare organizations in the U.S. and other countries. Ken Schwartz, an oncology patient who lived a brief 10 months following his diagnosis of lung cancer, spoke about the connection between the caregiver and patient, and how the smallest acts of kindness make the unbearable bearable (Schwartz, 1995). This philosophy can also be applied to academia.

As conducted with Schwartz rounds, faculty Courageous Caring Conversations held twice a semester can include faculty sharing challenging stories and situations that occurred during the semester. Situations can be related to scholarship, civic engagement, student scenarios, collegial conflict and many others. It

also provides a venue for celebrating successes. It is through this sharing that empathy and caring for one another is cultivated. When there is a relatedness among faculty, bonds are strengthened and wellbeing is enhanced.

Courageous Caring Conversations begin with a shared meal. This ritual of sharing a meal, breaking bread, sets the stage for building connections and empathy among faculty. In this informal gathering time, faculty share stories and laughter that allows them to be more vulnerable with each other. This practice offers the potential to build a culture of respectful caring that enhances the social capital among faculty to sustain them in times of conflict and challenge. After the meal faculty settle into a circle for Courageous Caring Conversations. The conversations are guided by Peggy Chinn's "Peace and Power" processes (2013). Commitment to the values of "Peace and Power" provide a strong foundation that support faculty as they engage in conversations that demonstrate praxis, empowerment, awareness, commitment, and involvement (Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2015).

Conclusion

A desirable work environment of respect can be developed when meaningful collaboration and compassion exist. These beliefs can help faculty connect in an authentic and substantial way through engaging in purposeful conversations providing support for one another and decreasing the sense of isolation. These Courageous Caring Conversations guided by "Peace and Power" processes result in a culture of trust and increased harmony where faculty celebrate successes and engage in creative solutions to challenges. Proactive solutions to addressing faculty retention and wellbeing such as the implementation of Courageous Caring Conversations support the development of healthy work environments where faculty can flourish.

Title:

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References:

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Abstract Summary:

This innovative strategy uses an adaptation of Schwartz Healthcare Rounds to establish a culture of respect and caring. Courageous Caring Conversations encourage faculty to explore ethical dilemmas and challenging academic or collegial situations that occur over the course of the semester. This practice supports establishment of a healthy academic workplace.

Content Outline:

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II. Development of a culture of caring

A. Boykin and Schoenhofer's Theory of Nursing as Caring

B. Setting the stage for a shift in paradigms, self-care as priority

III. Schwartz Rounds as a model for inspiration

A. Purpose

B. Outcomes

IV. Implementation of Courageous Caring Conversations

A. Orientation to the practice

1. Review of "Peace and Power" processes

2. Establishing a commitment to the process

B. Breaking Bread: Sharing a meal

1. Establishing relatedness

2. Building community

C. Opening

1. Affirming commitment to the process

2. Setting intentions and centering

3. Check-in

D. Navigating challenges

1. Agree to disagree

2. Letting go and sharing

3. Hearing all voices

E. Closing

1. Appreciation "Shout outs and Standouts"

2. Critical reflection

3. Affirmation

IV. Conclusion

A. Lessons learned

B. Implications for nursing education

First Primary Presenting Author

Primary Presenting Author

Brenda Kucirka, PhD, RN, PMHNCS-BC, CNE
Widener University
School of Nursing
Assistant Professor
Chester PA
USA

Author Summary: Dr. Kucirka is an Assistant Professor at Widener University, Chester, PA. She is a NLN certified Nurse Educator and Board Certified Psychiatric Mental Health Clinical Nurse Specialist. Her research focuses on issues in nursing education including the faculty student relationship, student mental health, nursing student and faculty self-care and ethical tension in academia. Dr. Kucirka presented numerous posters and podium presentations at local, regional, national and international nursing conferences as well as community educational programs.

Second Secondary Presenting Author

Corresponding Secondary Presenting Author

Mary Baumberger-Henry, PhD, RN
Widener University
School of Nursing
Professor of Nursing
Chester PA
USA

Author Summary: Dr. Baumberger-Henry has presented both podium and poster presentations at international, national, and regional nursing conferences. She has authored multiple manuscripts related to nursing education.