Sigma’s 30th International Nursing Research Congress

Establishing Professional Boundaries in the Nurse Faculty-Student Relationship: The Slippery Slope

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ABSTRACT

Professional boundaries are required to protect one’s self and others from intentional or unintentional harm. The issues of boundaries have been discussed in the literature in regards to the doctor and patient, psychologist and client and nurse-patient relationship. However, little research exists on the nurse faculty-student relationship and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of various teacher-student behaviors. The purpose of this quasi-experimental pilot project was to examine nurse faculty perceptions of appropriate professional behaviors between nursing faculty and their students after attending a faculty development workshop on professionalism and faculty-student boundaries.

Perceptions from N = 9 nursing faculty regarding specific faculty behaviors were collected and measured pre- and post-educational intervention utilizing a survey questionnaire. The behaviors described in the questionnaire were representative of the most common issues that nursing faculty struggle with (Henshaw, 2008; Tabachnick, Keith-Spiegel & Pope, 1991). Results indicate that the faculty development workshop (intervention) did not have a significant impact on nurse faculty perceptions. These results could be contributed to the small sample size which included experienced faculty (> 5 years in teaching), or participants already having a good understanding of professional nurse faculty behavior and professional boundaries prior to the workshop as demonstrated by low scores on the pretest indicating that participants perceived more than 50% of the 19 behaviors as 1= never appropriate.

Participants attributed their knowledge regarding professional nurse faculty behaviors to professional standards for educators (100%), professional standards for nurses (100%), training (89%), and educational preparation (89%). When institutions of higher education take the initiative to educate, train, and prepare their staff through mentoring, coaching, faculty development workshops, briefing, huddles, and debriefing, they are protecting their employees, students, the institution and society from the harmful effects of unprofessional behaviors that may occur in nurse faculty-student relationships.

Purpose:

The purpose of this quasi-experimental pilot project was to examine nurse faculty perceptions of appropriate professional behaviors between nursing faculty and their students after attending a faculty development workshop on professionalism and faculty-student boundaries.

Methods:

Perceptions from N = 9 nursing faculty regarding specific faculty behaviors were collected and measured pre- and post-educational intervention utilizing a survey questionnaire. The behaviors described in the questionnaire were representative of the most common issues that nursing faculty struggle with.

Results:

Results indicate that the faculty development workshop (intervention) did not have a significant impact on nurse faculty perceptions. These results could be contributed to the small sample size which included experienced faculty (> 5 years in teaching), or participants already having a good understanding of professional nurse faculty behavior and professional boundaries prior to the workshop as demonstrated
by low scores on the pretest indicating that participants perceived more than 50% of the 19 behaviors as 1= never appropriate.

**Conclusion:**

Participants attributed their knowledge regarding professional nurse faculty behaviors to professional standards for educators (100%), professional standards for nurses (100%), training (89%), and educational preparation (89%). When institutions of higher education take the initiative to educate, train and prepare their staff in through mentoring, coaching, faculty development workshops briefing, huddles and debriefing, they are protecting their employees, students, the institution and society from the harmful effects of unprofessional behaviors that may occur in nurse faculty-student relationships.

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**Title:**
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**Keywords:**
Education, Nursing and Professional Boundaries

**References:**
A nurse’s guide to professional boundaries. Chicago Ill.: National Council of State Boards of Nursing. Retrieved August, 2018 from: [https://www.ncsbn.org/professional-boundaries.htm](https://www.ncsbn.org/professional-boundaries.htm)


National Council of State Boards of Nursing (2014). A nurse’s guide to professional boundaries retrieved from [https://www.ncsbn.org/3757.htm](https://www.ncsbn.org/3757.htm)


**Abstract Summary:**
Participants will learn about the challenges nurse faculty face in establishing and maintaining professional boundaries in the nurse faculty-student relationship and various faculty development resources available to assist in protecting nurse faculty, students, the institution and society from the effects of unprofessional nurse faculty-student behaviors.

**Content Outline:**

1. **Title: Establishing Professional Boundaries in the Nurse Faculty-Student Relationship: The Slippery Slope**
2. Abstract
3. Body
4. Main Point #1: Faculty are held to high moral and ethical standards.
5. Supporting point #1: Faculty are expected to act in student’s best interest to:
   6. a) Treat students with respect
   7. b) Keep students safe
8. Supporting point #2: Background/Increase in the number of state/local complaints regarding unprofessionalism in:
9. a) Teacher-student relationships
10. b) Nurse-patient relationships
11. Main Point #2: Problem/Gap in knowledge
12. Supporting point #1: Lack of education and training especially for novice educators/nurses leads to:
13. a) Boundary crossings
14. b) Boundary violations
15. Supporting point #2: Consequences:
16. a) Personal
17. b) Professional
18. c) Legal
19. Main Point #3: Increase awareness
20. Supporting point #1: Education/Faculty development
21. a) Discussion
22. b) Briefs/huddles/debriefs
23. c) Video: Professional boundaries in nursing (NCSBN, 2014)
24. d) Case studies (Peters, 2008) dated but very applicable

III. Conclusion: Establishing and maintaining nursing faculty-student boundaries remains a problem (Henshaw, 2008; Plaut & Baker, 2011)

1. Support programs needed
2. Education=Prevention

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Author Summary: Dr. Kim Abraham is an Assistant Professor at UTMB School of Nursing. Prior to academia, Dr. Abraham was a pediatric nurse for over 20 years. Through her nursing experience, Dr. Abraham learned the importance of establishing and maintaining professional nurse-patient relationships. After transitioning into academia, as an inexperienced faculty, Dr. Abraham began to feel ill prepared in dealing with the challenges that arose in the nurse faculty-student relationship. This inspired her to look at literature.