Strengthening the Rural Nursing Workforce Through Stakeholder Engagement

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Background

Rural communities are facing critical shortages of Registered Nurses
• Recruitment and retention barriers
• Poor preparation for rural practice

What is known:
• Some recruitment barriers
• Lack of preparation affects retention

What is not known:
• How best to prepare nurses for rural practice
  o Content and concepts
  o Learning activities
  o Teaching strategies

Purpose

Engage stakeholders to identify strategies to improve recruitment, retention and preparation of nurses to strengthen rural nursing workforce

Approach

Stakeholder Engagement
• Rural health cooperative members
• Nursing faculty
• Senior nursing students

Goal

• Identify skills, knowledge, and attitudes that characterize readiness for rural practice
• Identify recruitment and retention challenges

Data collection and analysis
• Web-based surveys
  o Descriptive statistics
  o Semi-structured interviews
  o Thematic analysis

Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>n</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys (N=106)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-op members</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews (N=49)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
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<td>10.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-op members</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Characteristics of Participants

Size of Hometown

Completed a Rural Clinical Experience During Initial Nursing Training

Major Themes Related to Readiness for Rural Practice

Co-op Member & Faculty Perceptions of Readiness for Rural Practice

Student Knowledge, Perceptions and Beliefs About Rural Nursing Practice and Working in Rural Settings

Co-ops (n=55) Faculty (n=15)

Accurate Knowledge – Rural Nursing
• More older adults
• Culturally diverse population
• Reimbursement differences
• Lower wages
• Nursing practice is different

Inaccurate Knowledge – Rural Nursing
• Lower quality of care
• Cannot care for acutely ill
• Most patients can afford care
• Few alcohol or drug issues
• Limited career advancement

Beliefs – Rural Clinical Experiences
• Providers are well-trained
• Learn same in rural or urban area

Beliefs – Employment Influences
• Clinical influence choices
• Faculty influence choices

Perceptions - Living in Rural Areas
• People are friendly and welcoming
• Rural lifestyle enjoyable
• Sense of community
• Not isolated from others
• Would raise a family

Perceptions - Working in Rural Practice
• Privilege to work rural
• More opportunity to practice skills
• Good employment opportunities
• Supportive work environment
• Greater autonomy in practice

Major Themes Related to Readiness for Rural Practice

Reality of Rural Practice
“I thought I was all that — I managed units with hundreds of beds. I was out of my league, they ran circles around me.”
~ Rural Nurse

“People don’t think much of rural nursing. That’s where nurses end up who can’t hack it anywhere else.”
~ Student Nurse

Lifespan & Diverse Conditions
“That’s just a norm here. One minute you’re helping deliver a baby and the next there’s a trauma in the ED.”
~ Rural Nurse

“Why would I want to go to a rural hospital? I want to use my skills [as a nurse].”
~ Student Nurse

Understanding Rural Culture
“Sometimes [a farmer] has to finish their work before they can come in. It’s their livelihood. Students don’t get that.”
~ Rural Nurse

“You’d never go [into] rural nursing. I mean…there’s no mental stimulation there, no culture.”
~ Student Nurse

Conclusions

Gap exists between the knowledge and reality of rural practice
• Students hold misconceptions about rural nursing, rural health and rural populations
• Students lack knowledge of rural culture and rural health needs
• New graduate nurses do not demonstrate readiness for rural practice settings
• Rural content and experiences not sufficiently integrated into undergraduate nursing curriculum

Difference exists between stakeholders’ and nursing educators’ perceptions of new graduate nurse readiness for rural nursing practice

Major Themes Related to Readiness for Rural Practice

Recommendations

Close theory-practice gap
Prepare students for rural practice
• Address knowledge deficiencies
• Improve teaching effectiveness

Improve recruitment efforts
• Community-academic partnerships
• Showcase rural health systems

Improve retention strategies
• Supports for new graduate nurses
• Strengthen onboarding processes

Implications

Engage with stakeholders to address local priorities in a way that is culturally appropriate and sustainable
• Build on local strengths
• Increase social capital
• Tailor strategies and approaches

Accomplish more, together.