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INCHES: Creating the International Nursing Consortium of Honors Educators and Scholars

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Nursing honors programs are present in numerous universities either as a component of a university honors program/college, or as a departmental honors program. Nursing honors programs present unique challenges and opportunities as undergraduates must navigate the workload demand of clinical requirements and meet additional honors requirements. The benefits include early immersion in nursing scholarship and service learning, while developing strong student-faculty relationships. Honors faculty recognize how honors can leverage broader nursing goals, support faculty workforce development, and enrich the profession for the future. Honors programs in nursing build formal structures reducing the tendency to work in silos and creating authentic collaboration with emerging scholars.

The INCHS network was formed in order to facilitate nurse educators' dialog and collaboration on honors education. INCHES is the *International Nursing Consortium of Honors Educators and Scholars*. The network builds on the expertise from three faculty who have developed successful programs across diverse program structures and who share insight about fundamental principles and processes for developing sustainable and thriving honors programs for nursing. The founders all participated in Sigma Leadership Academies that encouraged team-building and leadership development. Initial activities of the INCHES Steering Committee included developing the mission, vision, and structure. The vision for INCHES is a global network of nurses involved in honors education in nursing strengthening outcomes through connecting, collaborating, and catalyzing global nursing excellence.

This session will explore the role of the network in nurturing innovative strategies and processes for establishing and sustaining thriving honors programs. It addresses the universal challenges commonly faced by nursing and pre-professional health science disciplines. Initial work focused on forming a steering committee and identifying programs and contact persons across the USA. Programs were identified from the top 40 NIH funded schools of nursing and a database was created of nursing honors programs. University/college websites were searched and another 70 programs were located. A call went out to two National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) lists to locate additional nursing honors programs and contacts. Network sampling (snowball) methods was used to add names and programs to the database. Faculty and administrators working or interested in nursing honors education and students

participating or interested in honors education at the university and departmental (nursing) level are invited to join.

We sought out an ambitious, adventurous group of these nursing honors educators, and some students, interested in forming the INCHES Steering Committee to define the network and bring it to life. Following a call to the network, ten honors educators were recruited from Arkansas, Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Steering committee members possessed a wide variety of education experiences from large and small, high activity research to liberal arts, public and private institutions. Their levels of engagement in honors education at department, school, and college levels included curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation. The Steering Committee was charged with (a) developing the mission, vision, and core values; (b) determining the structure of the organization, including the structure of the Board of Directors as well as the general membership levels and costs; (c) preparing the initial strategic plan, including strategic implementation initiatives; (d) approving the INCHES logo; and (e) developing the articles of incorporation and initial organizational bylaws.

The steering committee was convened at the beginning of the 2018-2019 Academic Year and is committed to make INCHES a vibrant community for our nursing honors educators and scholars. The initial steering committee sought to develop an organization that supports honors educators and honors students within pre-nursing and nursing programs. Three calls were designed for the steering committee to begin the process. Call 1 was a fact-finding call to hear from all members about current nursing educators and students and their involvement with honors, including obstacles as well as successes. We used the information to help formulate initial talking points for our second call. Call 2 focused on developing ideas for the organization's mission, vision, and initial strategic plan. Information from Calls 1 and 2, as well as other resources are shared through our INCHES work site, as we began to formulate our purpose. Smaller groups then worked together to finalize drafts. Call 3 was designated to review, finalize, and approve the structure. The timeline for network engaged the database of nursing honors programs throughout the country with opportunity for growth going forward, even to include international programs.

The literature on nursing honors programs was reviewed in 2016 by Lim, Nelson, Witkoski Stimpfel, Navarra, & Slater, and the following components were identified: selection and admissions, barriers and facilitators, curriculum design, logistics, and outcome evaluation. The authors found the major benefits of nursing honors programs to be providing opportunity for scholarly research and serving as a mechanism to socialize high-achieving students into the profession. Barriers identified that are amenable to network support include determining faculty workload, securing financial resources for honors students, sharing programmatic outcomes, and conducting program evaluation. Honors programs have demonstrated numerous benefits, including promoting the application of evidence and research to practice for new graduates (Bull, Shearer, Youl, & Campbell, 2018), as well as supporting high impact practices such as study abroad (Buckner & Holcomb, 2015), service learning, and undergraduate research (Jukkala, et al., 2016). Recent publications have described the role of honors education in Australia (Halcomb, Smyth, Moxham, Traynor, & Fernandez, 2018). All of these describe honors programs as offering specialized curriculum opportunities for

highly motivated students and promotion of early advanced education enrollment (Neuberger, 2016). In order to realize the benefits and overcome the challenges, however, a network is needed to encourage discussion, share of strategies, and offer mutual support during the leadership processes of program development. These are the approaches of INCHEs.

Through INCHEs, we explore the impact of honors education in all domains: a) Personal - scholarship, teaching, leadership, and professional development of students and faculty, b) Institutional - attract highly-motivated exceptional students and faculty; promote faculty, and commitment to students and the institution; student assistance for faculty with research and other scholarship activities, c) Professional - propel the profession forward by producing the next generation of nurse leaders and scholars. The breadth and experience of INCHEs network members and a responsiveness to changes and trends in honors education make the INCHEs network a significant contribution to nursing education and workforce development.

As honors educators, we understand the unique issues related to honors in professional schools such as nursing. We are excited about the opportunity to work with experts such as honors program coordinators across the USA and internationally to begin the conversations that will lead to a robust organization that will provide support, best practices, and networking opportunities for nursing honors educators and scholars around the globe. Our intent is to move forward by INCHEs, engaging honors educators and scholars in the needed dialog to further this curriculum option for nursing education.

Title:

INCHEs: Creating the International Nursing Consortium of Honors Educators and Scholars

Keywords:

Honors Program, Nursing Education and Program Development

References:

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Abstract Summary:

Nursing honors programs have been shown to promote leadership development, socialization to the profession, and early advanced education enrollment for students. However, nursing honors programs face many implementation hurdles. INCHES is a new network to encourage discussion, share strategies, and offer mutual support for nursing honors program development and implementation.

Content Outline:

1. Description of the problem
1. Broad lack of understanding of honors education and how honors can leverage broader nursing goals
2. Faculty and students are working in silos
3. Need for formal structure and leadership to support faculty and students
2. Formation of INCHES
 1. Creation of the International Consortium of Honors Educators and Scholars (INCHES)
 2. Foundations of educational leadership in nursing honors developed through Sigma's leadership academies
 3. Database development of nursing honors programs
 4. Steering committee formation and breadth
 5. Development of mission, vision, strategic plan, organizational structure and bylaws
3. Literature in support of honors education in nursing
 1. Lim et al. (2016) described nursing honors education through a review reviewed the literature
 2. Neuberger (2016) described these programs as offering specialized curricula to highly motivated students.
 3. Benefits have been reported (Bull, et al., 2018)
 4. High impact practice in honors education include study abroad (Buckner & Holcomb, 2015), undergraduate research and service learning (Jukkala et al., 2016)
 5. Global nursing honors education has been reported in Australia (Halcomb et al., 2018)
 6. A network of honors educators for continuing dialogue is needed
4. Exploring the impact of INCHES
 1. Personal - scholarship, teaching, leadership, and professional development of students and faculty
 2. Institutional - attract highly-motivated exceptional students and faculty; promote faculty commitment to students and the institution; student assistance for faculty with research and other scholarship activities
 3. Professional - propel the profession forward by producing the next generation of nurse leaders and scholars
5. Next steps
 1. Promote INCHES nationally and internationally
 2. Develop robust mechanisms for communication and idea-sharing

3. Build a culture of honors education that aligns with mission/vision of individual home institutions

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