Virtual Peer Mentorship Model: Fostering Support Through Accountability

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Scholarly development and gender equity for advancement among faculty remain key priorities across academic disciplines, including those in healthcare (de Sax Zerden et al. 2015; Heinrich, 2018). In an undergraduate nursing program, nursing faculty identified challenges and barriers to advancing scholarship, which is necessary for promotion, and formed a team for testing solutions. The literature was reviewed on emerging faculty development innovations in peer mentoring, the scholarship of teaching, and communities of practice (Brody et al. 2016; Cassese & Holman, 2018; Nick et al., 2012; Cole & March, 2018; Nowell, White, Marklas & Norris, 2015). As a result, the Woman’s Faculty Support Group (WFSG) was developed in order to provide a supportive climate and unique opportunities for undergraduate nursing faculty to connect and collaborate, geared toward achieving their full academic potential through peer mentorship and scholarship productivity. Virtual mentoring took place weekly over a period of six weeks with 2 cycles. Once weekly hour long virtual team meetings took place, with one member of the support group serving as the facilitator. Each week one faculty member would submit three ongoing projects for review to the group. The facilitator would then assist faculty peers to determine how each would spend one hour focusing their expertise on one of the three project areas. The submitting faculty’s hour on scholarship would be substantially amplified by each member’s synchronous hour contribution to that work during the virtual session. The hour was broken up into 15 minute intervals with 2 minute breaks in between to ask clarifying questions. Faculty rotated responsibilities, and tasks throughout the six weeks of virtual mentoring. An initial evaluation of the first round of the support group was conducted using 11 Likert scale questions, along with open-ended feedback. Questions focused on the ability to organize scholarship, progress on tasks that were previously challenging, benefit of peer feedback, accountability, productivity, and overall assistance with professional development. Responses were overwhelmingly positive on all scaled items and qualitative comments. Though virtual, this novel mentoring program promoted faculty feeling valued and connected to the academic setting. The support group demonstrated that successful mentoring relationships improve professional growth, competency, and productivity. In addition, adequate support and guidance for the support group proved to be a key ingredient to success for nursing faculty. Virtual peer mentoring is a valuable
resource to faculty for professional growth, development, scholarship and skills. The heightened need for scholarly faculty development and equity in advancement is not unique to nursing and the virtual peer mentorship strategy can be applied to other disciplines.

Title:
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Abstract Summary:
The Women’s Faculty Support Group (WFSG) creates an innovative pathway for nursing faculty to connect, collaborate, and thrive. This presentation describes the use of virtual synchronous platforms to support a community of peer mentorship, caring, accountability, productivity, and skill building among clinical nursing faculty for professional development, advancement, and scholarship.

Content Outline:
1. Introduction
1. Scholarly development and gender equity for advancement among faculty remain key priorities across academic disciplines, including those in healthcare. In an undergraduate nursing program challenges and barriers to advancing scholarship, which is necessary for promotion, were identified among clinical faculty.
2. The Woman’s Faculty Support Group, (WFSG) was developed to help bridge that gap.
3. Faculty members of this virtual support group work as a team to support each other in their professional goals, geared toward helping faculty achieve their full academic potential through support, leadership, mentoring, sponsorship, and skill building.

2. Developing a virtual peer mentorship model
1. Needs Assessment
1. Initial informal conversations with undergraduate nursing faculty to identify challenges and barriers to academic promotion.
2. Review of the literature regarding models for peer mentorship and scholarly productivity

2. Strategic Plan and Structure
1. Establishment of support group goals and objectives
2. Creation of a weekly virtual meeting focused on scholarly productivity
3. Evaluation
1. Overall evaluation of the support group
2. Evaluation of whether goals and objectives were met
3. Sustainability and suggestions for improvement

3. Conclusion
1. Adequate support and guidance for the support group is a key ingredient to success for nursing faculty.
2. Successful mentoring relationships improve professional growth, competency, and productivity.
3. Mentoring innovations form the foundation for ongoing preparation of a new generation of nursing faculty

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In order to develop the skills related to inter-professional cooperation she has students think of the classes as a community of professional colleges rather than a collection of individuals competing with one another.

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