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The Supporting Professional Advancement in Nursing (SPAN) Program: Advancing Nurse Education, Supporting Maryland’s Nursing Workforce

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Background

In a rapidly changing health care environment, and with a forecasted shortage of RNs by 2025 (HRSA, 2014), Maryland’s hospitals and health systems have a critical need to retain well-prepared new graduate nurses and to ensure adequate numbers of qualified nurses with advanced nursing degrees in its workforce. In 2015, the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing (JHSON), in partnership with five area hospitals received funding from the Maryland Higher Education Commission to develop and implement an innovative program called Supporting Professional Advancement in Nursing (SPAN). Innovative programs are needed to facilitate the seamless transition from pre-licensure nursing student to new graduate nurse and ultimately, a return to graduate studies so that nurses can achieve higher levels of education and training (IOM, 2010, p.4) while simultaneously keeping these nurses actively employed. Currently in year 4 of a 5 year grant cycle, the goal of the SPAN Program is to enhancing new nurse retention while advancing the education of students and RNs to MSN and Doctoral level to meet the future needs of Maryland’s nursing workforce.

Methods

The SPAN program has established academic-practice partnerships with five Maryland area hospitals for participants to complete their clinical practicums and be offered employment. The program consists of three phases spanning from the final clinical rotation in the participants’ pre-licensure education to graduation from a specialty MSN or DNP program approximately three to four years later. Phase I occurs during the last practicum course of the pre-licensure program and lasts approximately seven months. Phase II commences upon the student’s successful completion of the NCLEX exam at which point the newly licensed registered nurse transitions to full-time employment in their designated health system. Phase III begins after the participant has completed one year of full-time clinical practice and involves enrollment in a graduate specialty or DNP program while working full or part-time on the designated unit.

In addition to career placement in a participant’s desired area of nursing practice, the SPAN Program provides a variety of benefits and incentives to participants at various stages throughout the program. In the early stages of the program, incentives include a free NLCEX review course, a Maryland Nurses Association membership, and an opportunity to participate in the Guiding Initiatives for Doctoral Education (GUIDE) workshop, a one day interactive workshop specifically for nurses who are considering applying to a doctoral program. The SPAN program hosts regular luncheons with a guest speakers who address a current and relevant topic in nursing practice, and SPAN
participants receive monthly text messages from the program on topics related to enhancing nursing skill sets and their transition to practice. The SPAN Program created a series of nine, self-paced online learning modules as another tool to support and engage the new graduate nurse with their transition to practice. Mentorship is a critical component of the SPAN Program model to support academic and career achievement. All participants are matched with an onsite hospital based mentor and a JHSON faculty mentor. The Program hosts a yearly mentor training for all hospital based mentors to ensure participants have a quality mentorship experience.

Findings*
At the end of program year three SPAN had a total of 29 participants, all of whom were offered and accepted full-time nursing positions. Additionally, 14 (48.2%) of these participants were enrolled or accepted in an advanced specialty nursing degree program. In PY 4 we received 25 applications for SPAN, a 127% increase in applicants to the program from the previous year, and admitted 19 which is an increase of 72%. At the end of program year 3 the retention of nurses who have begun full-time employment as RNs in the SPAN Program is 87.5%, having lost only 4 nurses to attrition. Results of our mentee satisfaction survey showed that 58% of SPAN participants who responded indicated they were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the quality of the mentorship they receive from their hospital based and faculty mentors.

Conclusion
The SPAN Program has successfully used employment placement, mentorship, participant incentives, text notifications and online learning modules to engage and support new graduate nurses who have entered Maryland’s nursing workforce. The applicant numbers and retention data suggests that 1) students and new nurse graduates are very receptive to this early career opportunity to help launch them into their desired nursing specialty practice and 2) nurses are committing to their employers for three years which aids our health care partners in ensuring adequate nurse staffing and 3) nearly half of SPAN participants have already enrolled in an advanced specialty nursing degree program. Evaluation metrics are in place to measure the satisfaction and efficacy of the mentoring component of the Program. Data collection and qualitative feedback from participants is ongoing including efforts to conduct a robust program evaluation that will examine participant incentive satisfaction, and overall program satisfaction.

*Should this abstract be selected for a poster presentation at the 2019 Biennial Convention we will update our data to reflect data numbers current per year 4 of the program.

Title:
The Supporting Professional Advancement in Nursing (SPAN) Program: Advancing Nurse Education, Supporting Maryland's Nursing Workforce

Keywords:
nursing education, transition to practice and workforce development
Abstract Summary:

The SPAN Program is an innovative workforce development program that employs academic-practice partnerships with the goal of advancing the education of students and RNs to MSN, and Doctoral levels, while supporting and retaining new nurse graduates in Maryland's nursing workforce.

Content Outline:

I. Background
A. Maryland’s hospitals and health systems need to retain new graduate nurses.
B. Maryland’s nursing workforce must have adequate numbers of qualified nurses with advanced nursing degrees to meet the demand.
C. The Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing (JHSON) received funding from the Maryland Higher Education Commission to develop the Supporting Professional Advancement in Nursing (SPAN) Program. 1. SPAN facilitates the seamless transition from pre-licensure nursing student to new graduate nurse and ultimately, a return to graduate studies. 2. SPAN allows nurses to achieve higher levels of education and training while actively employed.
II. Methods
A. The SPAN Program has academic-practice partnerships with five Maryland area hospitals.
B. SPAN participants complete their clinical practicums at a hospital on a unit of interest.
C. Participants are offered employment on the
same unit where they completed their practicum. D. SPAN consists of three phases 1. Phase I occurs during the last practicum course of the pre-licensure program and lasts approximately seven months. 2. Phase II commences upon the student’s successful completion of the NCLEX exam at which point the newly licensed registered nurse transitions to full-time employment in their designated health system. 3. Phase III begins after the participant has completed one year of full-time clinical practice and involves enrollment in a graduate specialty or DNP program while working full or part-time on the designated unit. E. The SPAN Program provides a variety of benefits and incentives to participants. 1. Program incentives a) Free NLCEX review course b) Maryland Nurses Association membership c) Guiding Initiatives for Doctoral Education (GUIDE) workshop d) Regular luncheons with guest speakers e) Monthly text messages related to transition to practice 2. Program benefits a) Access to nine (9) self-paced online learning modules that aid with transition to practice b) Mentorship (1) Onsite hospital based mentor (2) JHSON faculty mentor III. Findings A. Data and statistics for participants for end of program year (PY) 3 1. 29 participants were offered and accepted full-time nursing positions. 2. 14 (48.2%) participants were enrolled or accepted in an advanced specialty nursing degree program. 3. 25 applications received for SPAN a) 127% increase in applicants to the program from the previous year b) 19 admitted - increase of 72%. 4. Retention of nurses who have begun full-time employment as RNs is 87.5% 5. Mentee satisfaction survey - 58% of SPAN participants were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the quality of the mentorship they receive from their mentors IV. Conclusion A. The SPAN Program uses employment placement, participant incentives, and program benefits to support new graduate nurses entering Maryland’s nursing workforce. B. Students and new nurse graduates are receptive to early career help launch them into their desired nursing specialty practice. C. Nurses are committing to their employers for three years which aids in ensuring adequate nurse staffing D. Nearly half of SPAN participants have enrolled in an advanced specialty nursing degree program. E. Evaluation metrics are in place to measure the satisfaction and efficacy of the mentoring component of the Program. F. Data collection and qualitative feedback from participants is ongoing.

First Primary Presenting Author

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Author Summary: Internationally recognized for her work in disaster and public health preparedness Dr. Veenema serves as senior scientist-Red Cross National Scientific Advisory Board, elected Fellow in the National Academies of Practice and American Academy of Nursing, served as the 2018 Distinguished Nurse Scholar in Residence at the National Academy of Medicine, was a 2017 Fulbright US Scholar, and awarded the Florence Nightingale International Red Crescent Medal of Honor, the highest international award a nurse can receive.
Author Summary: Sarah Firestone has years of health care leadership experience. As a Masters prepared social worker, Sarah provides leadership and ongoing management of the SPAN Supporting Professional Advancement in Nursing program. She has established and maintained each of the five academic practice partnerships and advises the SPAN participants. Sarah developed the online learning modules and innovative push text messaging system to support new graduate nurses.

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Author Summary: A nurse for over 28 years, Dr. McIltrot began her career as an Army nurse, then worked as a pediatric nurse practitioner specializing in pediatric surgery before transitioning to academia in 2016. She is currently an Assistant Professor at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing. Dr. McIltrot has received numerous honors and awards including becoming a Nurse Leadership Institute Fellow in 2017.

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Author Summary: A nurse for 30 years, Ms. Johnson's career has taken her to various bedside nursing settings. In 2013 she received her MSN in Nursing Leadership from Notre Dame of Maryland University and in 2016 she began her full-time clinical faculty position at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing. Ms. Johnson is currently pursuing her DNP degree.