

## 45th Biennial Convention (16-20 November 2019)

### Nurses Night Out: A Successful Strategy for Chapter Revitalization and Nursing Community Engagement

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**Purpose and background:** Maintaining a vibrant chapter is a priority for all Sigma leaders. Networking broadly with local non-member nurses also provides an avenue to model the Sigma vision of scholarship, leadership, and service. This presentation details the process initiated within a rural chapter facing a crisis in sustainability. In 2011 the affiliated Bachelor of Science in Nursing program closed, eliminating the pipeline of new student members. As the core group of active members dwindled in size, event participation reached very low levels. Members of the Board of Directors (BOD) were filling all committee roles, with virtually no participation from other chapter members. An innovative format of professional events led to substantial gains in participation as well as enhanced visibility in the local nursing community. Improved engagement of non-member nurses provided an opportunity to strengthen intra-professional relationships and foster professional commitment. Outreach to Associate Degree students allowed opportunities for mentorship and relationship development. Lessons learned may be broadly applicable for chapters seeking to build membership as well as those wishing to network more widely with local nurses within the community.

**Methods:** In 2015, leaders of a rural Sigma chapter developed a plan to broaden outreach through regularly scheduled events called *Nurses Night Out (NNO)*. Chapter leaders had received feedback that many local nurses were under the impression that honor society educational events were exclusive or elite. A campaign to combat this idea was launched through specific messaging and marketing strategies and through focused outreach. The BOD selected presentation topics most likely to be of interest to the broadest possible group, including nurse advocacy, moral distress in nursing, and cross-cultural adventures for nurses. Presenters offered research findings and scholarly content but made a deliberate effort to keep material broadly accessible. Each event included food, and after some reflection, beer or wine for purchase. After the second event, program organizers began to include standard fundraising strategies through raffles and other activities. All events after the first were self-sustaining through a low entry fee and donation of food by chapter leaders and other community members.

**Results:** Initial meeting attendance was fourfold previous events, and meetings since have shown steadily increasing attendance. More specifically, attendance at events prior to development of the NNO format generated an average attendance of 10 – 15 individuals whereas attendance at NNO events has ranged from 50 – 90. The events created a stronger sense of community among local nurses, which led to a greater interest in the chapter and Sigma in general. Chapter membership stabilized and began to increase. Active members have volunteered for committee service and other roles with the chapter, allowing development of future leaders. More recent events have

resulted in modest fund-raising gains, allowing the chapter to direct more funds to local nursing scholarships and donations to community agencies.

**Conclusion:** A strategy focused on greater inclusion, de-mystifying nursing research and scholarship, and on an enjoyable evening out has potential to enhance interest in nursing honor society participation. Unifying a broad community of nurses around common issues provided opportunities for leaders to role model Sigma values. Lessons learned in the process of developing Nurses Night Out have potential to benefit other chapters. Challenges remain, especially in outreach to staff nurses.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

chapter sustainability, intra-professional engagement and outreach

**References:**

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**Abstract Summary:**

This presentation details a unique model which led to substantial gains in participation at chapter events and strengthened relationships across the nursing community as a whole. Presenters will offer strategies for success and lessons learned.

**Content Outline:**

Nurses Night Out: A successful strategy for chapter revitalization and nursing community engagement.

I. Introduction

- A. Common concerns related to chapter sustainability
- B. Unique circumstances for small rural chapters and for Omicron Omega
- C. Relationship of Sigma chapters to the broader community of nurses

II. Development of Nurses Night Out events

- A. Addressing perceived barriers to participation
- B. Early steps
  - 1. Varying visions across the chapter Board of Directors
  - 2. Trial first event
  - 3. Enticements
- C. Evolution of the process
  - 1. Topic selection and maintaining scholarship
  - 2. Marketing and broadening outreach
  - 3. Inclusion of fundraising
  - 4. Outgrowing the venue and new challenges

D. Volunteer fatigue

E. Experimenting with the format

III. Results

- A. Event participation
- B. Interest in chapter engagement and membership
- C. Fundraising
- D. Continued challenges

IV. Conclusion

First Primary Presenting Author

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**Author Summary:** Patricia Farmer is a nurse practitioner and educator from northern California. She has over 35 years of experience in nursing including roles in practice, academia, and policy. She served as a nurse researcher and strategist for the Academic Progression in

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**Author Summary:** Kim Perris is the current President of Omicron Omega. Since 2015 she has worked to organize and promote nurse leadership through Nurses Night Out events. Through presentations, and publications, Kim has sought to elevate the nursing profession by helping nurses recognize their full potential and contributions to improving health care systems.