Supporting early career nurses: The key to enhancing professional and personal excellence

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Disclosure statement

• Learner objectives:
  • Recognise the areas of support currently used by early career nurses
  • Consider strategies to support early career nurses that will assist professional and personal excellence

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Background

• Early career nurses (ECN) are registered nurses in their first 2 years of practice
• In Australia,
  • Registered Nurse education is conducted within the university sector
  • The minimum entry requirement for practice is a Bachelor of Nursing
  • The duration of a Bachelor of Nursing is three years
Following graduation, the majority of newly registered nurses are employed in a transition to professional practice program.

- Predominantly public acute care hospitals.
- Each program varies in the level of support provided and the types of structured activities.
Transition period

• Period that allows for the consolidation of knowledge and practice required of a registered nurse

• Can be stressful and difficult

• Supportive relationships, such as those evident in a mentoring relationship, may impact transition and maybe helpful in helping ECNs to negotiate this period

• Some suggestion that negative transition experiences might be a factor in the increasing numbers of ECNs who leave the profession
Research project

• Interested in understanding the mentoring relationship between ECNs and others
  • In particular, how ECNs found mentors
  • What support they received during their transition experience

• Grounded theory approach

• Interviewed 8 ECNs using semi structured approaches

• Several categories were developed including:
  • Graduate feelings
  • Finding mentors
  • The mentor
  • The non-mentor
  • **Ways of support** – focus of this presentation
Ways of support

- Despite being in transition to practice programs, ECNs found that mentoring was rarely used
- Formalised support was uncommon
- ECNs found that many nurses were not interested in supporting those less experienced
“I felt quite under supported”

• “Sounds pretty dramatic but there wasn’t really anyone I could speak to”

• “You know, when they are so horrible and you feel so vulnerable because you don’t know what you are doing... they just don’t know how painful that is and how embarrassing it is and I wish I had the confidence to tell them”

• “It wasn’t until one of the new grads started crying after handover that our educator realised that maybe everything wasn’t Ok”

• “Looking back, it was so hard I think there could have been more support”
The support provided to ECNs was adhoc at best

- ECNs used non-formal ways of support
- They found their own mentors
- And they turned to other ECNs for support
  - Shared experiences
  - Solved problems together
  - Debriefed together

- “We were in the same boat”
- “The new grads are really good actually, its kind of like a little gang”
How did this make the ECN feel?

- Struggling
- Abandoned and alone
- Challenged
- Scared
- Overwhelmed

- Many sort support outside the hospital system
What is the effect of no support?

• The role of support in the early practice years is not entirely understood

• It is realistic to expect that support would help the ECN adjust to the practice environment and integrate the knowledge and practice learnt during their Nursing education

• “You are going to struggle and you are going to feel like you are drowning some days and that is the way it is going to be”
What can we do to support ECNs?

• Examine the methods used to support the transition to practice
• Reconsider the role of mentoring and how this could be used to provide support
• Provide greater training for those offering support
• Understand why ECNs look to each for support and see if we can further develop these relationships
• Begin the preparation for practice during the final year of their degree – particularly in exploring the use of mentors
I would like to thank my participants for sharing their stories with me

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References

