Purpose: The purpose of this research was to design and evaluate an innovative workforce development program that would be generalizable and reproducible in other countries and world regions.

Background

- The US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), recently reported that Maryland is one of 16 U.S. states projected to experience a serious shortfall of registered nurses (RN) by 2025 (HRSA, 2014).
- Globally, the nursing shortage is limiting access to health care services and impacting health outcomes across many countries.
- Innovative education and workplace partnership programs are needed to retain new nursing graduates in times of shortage to funnel them into open ‘high-need’ positions at area health care systems.
- An opportunity exists to establish strong coordinated and collaborative academic–workplace partnerships to improve the way

  1) advise and assist our pre-licensure nursing students with identifying and obtaining appropriate job placements,
  2) onboard and support the transition of the new nurse into the clinical setting
  3) use technology and social media to establish an innovative communication and information sharing system to support their first three years in practice,
  4) meet the nurses’ need for professional growth and career development, and
  5) facilitate the new nurses’ enrollment into graduate nursing programs of study.

Methods

- In 2015, the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing (JHSON), in partnership with four area hospitals and health care systems, received grant funding from the Maryland Higher Education Commission to develop, implement and evaluate an innovative phased program of research called Supporting Professional Advancement in Nursing (SPAN).
- Student’s apply to SPAN Program, are placed on a unit of mutual interest to student and employer. Upon satisfactory performance during their practicum they are hired onto unit.
- Nursing faculty from JHSON provide career advisement and academic mentoring to SPAN participants starting in their final semester of nursing school to support their transition to the workplace and enrollment in graduate nursing programs.
- Concurrently, expert clinical hospital-based nurses employed in the same institution have been identified and provide professional mentoring and workplace support.
- Technology including regular text messages and access to online learning modules are used to support and engage program participants during their first three years in practice.
- The SPAN Program provides semi annual mentor trainings and regular participant gatherings featuring an educational component to foster engagement among participants and their mentors.

Findings

- The first two years of this innovative academic workplace partnership program are now complete. Eighteen students who completed their practicum were offered full-time nursing positions and 16 of those accepted. Three students are still in the process of completing their practicum. Students who have accepted remain gainfully employed, have transitioned successfully into the workplace and many are applying to graduate advanced nursing programs of study with 3 already being accepted for Fall 2017.

Conclusions

- The data suggest that:
  1) students are very receptive to this new opportunity early in their career,
  2) academic-workplace partnerships improve communications between organizations and nurses who work in them,
  3) an Innovative Smart phone based text-messaging system to disseminate a series of timed messages of support and information can enhance and sustain the nurses’ engagement in the academic–practice partnership.
- Ideas generated by mentors and program participants include:
  1) strengthening the SPAN community by offering activities for mentors and participants to attend together,
  2) surveying participants to find out what they hope to get out of mentorship and providing additional mentor trainings.
- Feedback and suggestions will continue to be incorporated into program planning to develop and strengthen the SPAN mentorship model further.

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF NURSING, BALTIMORE, MD

Supporting Professional Advancement in Nursing
SPAN Program

Students apply, are interviewed for SPAN Program participation in their 4th semester (of five semesters). Once selected for program, students have access to JHSON Faculty mentors who begin offering career and academic advice and guidance.

SPAN Program Application/Interview Phase

- **Phase 1 - Final Clinical Practicum**
  - 14 week experience leading to full-time RN employment in practicum facility.
  - Program participants actively mentored by JHSON Faculty Mentors and practicum facility to ensure goodness of fit and participant satisfaction with nursing unit.

- **Phase 2 - Explore Specialty Role**
  - Now graduate RN SPAN participants work full-time in practicum facility.
  - Participants assigned a JHSON Faculty Mentor and an experienced unit nurse mentor to provide support and guidance. Mentors check in and meet with participants at a minimum of 3 x per year.
  - Unit mentors are trained by SPAN Program staff on SPAN mentorship model.

- **Phase 3 - Generalist to Specialist**
  - RN participants enrolled in a graduate program while continuing to work full or part-time in the practicum facility.
  - Participants have regular contact with faculty and unit based nurse mentors with a contact at least 3 x per year.