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New Graduate Nurse Retention Strategies: An Integrative Literature Review

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New Graduate Nurse Retention Strategies: An Integrative Literature Review

Scholarly Inquiry Paper
Submitted to the Faculty
of the Department of Nursing
College of Nursing and Health Sciences
of Winona State University

by
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Abstract

Decreasing nurse retention rates, particularly of new graduate nurses, is a costly issue for health care organizations across the country. Turnover rates for new nurses average around 20% in the first year following graduation (Kovner, et al., 2014). Low retention rates also create staff burnout, orientation fatigue for preceptors, poor morale, and safety concerns. The purpose of this integrative literature review is to identify best practice strategies and interventions to increase new graduate nurse retention in the acute care setting. Ten articles were selected for this review, including three high-level systematic reviews. Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory was chosen as the conceptual model. The theory is based on a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. The ability for new graduate nurses to achieve self-efficacy affects retention rates. The findings of this literature review further align with and support self-efficacy among new graduate nurses. The literature supports successful orientation of new graduate nurses leads to increased retention rates. Four themes associated with increasing graduate nurse retention rates were extrapolated from the literature, including quality preceptors and mentors, education, leadership opportunities, and nurse residency programs. Organizations that incorporated these strategies and interventions saw an increase in new graduate nurse retention rates as well as cost savings. The themes occupy strategies and interventions that can complement one another and be assumed within a quality nurse residency program. Nurse residency programs are a structured, comprehensive approach to new graduate nurse education aiming for successful transition from the academic setting to the practice setting. Ultimately, it is recommended to implement a nurse residency program that incorporates quality preceptors/mentors and education, that also has a leadership focus to achieve improved new graduate nurse retention rates in the acute care setting.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Winona State University

COMPLETED SCHOLARLY INQUIRY PAPER APPROVAL FORM

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FROM: Amy Fiala

RE: FACULTY ENDORSEMENT and FINAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

DATE: 11/18/2021

SCHOLARLY INQUIRY PAPER TITLE:
       New Graduate Nurse Retention Strategies: An Integrative Literature Review

SCHOLARLY INQUIRY PAPER COMMITTEE:

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Date of Final Approval by Committee: 1/18/2021

Introduction

Nurse retention is an issue facing health care organizations across the country. "A survey of 136 organizations in 2017 indicated bedside registered nurse turnover averaged 14.9%, with an annual hospital financial loss of $5.13 M - $7.86 M" (Brook et al., 2019, p. 48). The financial loss associated with nurses leaving positions is a significant problem for many organizations. Nurses leaving positions also creates decreased morale, stress on the remaining staff, and safety concerns and ultimately may lead to additional nurse turnover (Reitz & Anderson, 2011). Retaining experienced nurses is an ongoing problem. For example, a medical-surgical unit within a large Midwestern acute care facility has experienced increased nurse turnover consistently for five years.

Background and Rationale

Hirschkorn et al. (2019) explored current challenges facing nurses that are causing nurses to leave the hospital bedside. Challenges include patients becoming more complex in care and a push to discharge patients quickly. This creates an intensified care process leading to quicker burnout for nurses. Many experienced nurses are looking to retire or leave the acute care setting for less demanding jobs. Experienced nurses leaving impacts remaining staff. Remaining staff may have to work additional hours and be responsible to train new staff. Without experienced nurses to train new staff, novice nurses are training new graduate nurses. This not only adds pressure to remaining nursing staff but also can present a safety concern; less experienced staff are available as a resource to new nurses, the unit, and department (Tang and Hudson, 2019).

In some situations, temporary nurses or travel nurses may be used. Hiring travel nurses and paying to train new staff can be a large financial cost for organizations (Hirschkorn, et al., 2019). There are intangible costs associated with nurse retention issues as well. Loss of

confidence in management, disruption in day-to-day workflow, and burnout among staff from additional workload impact outcomes. A significant correlation between nurse retention and decreased staff morale exists. Decreased morale creates a burdensome work environment and leads to additional nurses leaving (Reitz & Anderson, 2011).

The current nursing workforce spans four generations, all bringing different values and insight. These varying values influence each generation and play a part in nurse retention. One factor affecting retention is that the nursing workforce is aging and there are less experienced nurses at the bedside. In the next fifteen years, 33% of the nursing workforce will be at retirement age (Haddad et al., 2020). New graduate nurses, making up the younger generations, present unique retention challenges. Turnover rates for new nurses average around 20% in the first year after graduating (Kovner, et al., 2014). With experienced nurses leaving the bedside, coupled with new nurses leaving before gaining experience, nurse retention becomes an issue.

As numerous reasons exist for nurses leaving the bedside, the solution is multifactorial. Organizations and hospitals believe there is no one strategy or process that will fix or significantly improve nurse retention (Hirschkorn et al., 2019). Nurse retirement is recurrent and for this reason this scholarly inquiry focuses specifically on the retention of new graduate nurses. New graduate nurses are primarily part of the Millennial generation, currently. Their primary values are work achievement, producing quality work, and sense of community/positive relationships with coworkers (Kuron, et al., 2015). Retention strategies that can be easily replicated across multiple organizations are not known and additional research to evaluate proposed solutions to new graduate retention issues for acute care nursing is needed.

Purpose

The purpose of this integrative literature review is to identify strategies and interventions to increase new graduate nurse retention in the acute care setting. Comparisons of interventions and strategies identified in the literature shown to increase retention have been explored to formulate recommendations to increase nurse retention rates in acute care settings.

Question

What are effective strategies and interventions to increase new graduate nurse retention in the acute care setting?

Method Used for Inquiry

The method used for this inquiry paper was an integrative literature review. A literature review is an in-depth analysis and summary on a topic based upon available research. Use of non-research literature can also be beneficial (Cronin, et al., 2008). Multiple sources, opinions, and research studies were examined to gain an understanding of nurse retention and provide rational for potential strategies and interventions.

Literature Review

Introduction

A relevant literature review was done to identify best practices in increasing new graduate nurse retention in the acute care setting. Articles were selected based on levels of evidence and the specific population of interest. Many articles are available regarding nurse retention and nurse turnover; however this review specifically explores new graduate nurse retention.

Search Strategy

CINHAL and ProQuest search engines were utilized to conduct a search of the literature (see Table 1). Key words and phrases used included: nurse retention, nurse retention + acute

care, nurse retention + strategies, nurse retention + nurse residency, and new graduate nurse

retention. Reviewing articles published in English and between the years 2011-2020 further

refined the search. Articles that did not include research in acute care settings were excluded.

Articles were chosen for further examination by reviewing the abstract. Ten articles were

included in this literature review and are listed in Table 2.

Levels of Evidence

The included studies represent a variety of levels of evidence. Three systematic reviews

are considered level I evidence. Four studies are level II evidence, two of which are

experimental, and two are cross sectional designs. Level III evidence includes one cross sectional

study and one quasi-experimental study. One level IV study is included that represents a

secondary analysis. Many of the studies have qualitative elements but not classified as qualitative

studies. The systematic reviews were further analyzed using the critical appraisal tool found in

Appendixes A-C.

Themes

Several themes were found through the literature review supporting promotion of new

graduate nurse retention. These include quality preceptors and mentors, education, leadership

opportunities, and nurse residency programs. These themes are further discussed below.

Quality Preceptors and Mentors

A quality preceptor or mentor is key to graduate nurse development. "Relationship

between preceptor and preceptee is fundamental for psychological support, knowledge exchange

and role modeling" (Brooks et al., 2019, pg. 49). Through their systematic review, Brooks et al.

(2019) found that interventions with enhanced preceptor support saw increased retention

compared to those with lower levels of preceptor support. Friedman et al., (2013) explored how

incorporating nurse leaders as mentors, associate fellows (experienced nurses educated in precepting new nurses), and master's fellows (masters prepared nursing educators) into the orientation model improved retention. Findings indicate the increased focus on quality preceptors and mentors lead to a positive change in new graduate nurse retention increase from 84% to 94% at the organization level (Friedman et al., 2013).

Lin et al. (2014) in a systematic review note that supporting preceptors and mentors had a direct impact on new nurses' perceptions of nursing interactions, support, trust, and teamwork within the unit. Krivanke et al. (2020) implemented TeamSTEPPS to assess teamwork, retention, and incivility in the Intensive Care Unit. The program proved successful with employees' reported intent to stay in their position increased by 32% following implementation of program. The unit has since ensured having Master TeamSTEPPS trained preceptors. Having preceptors trained in TeamSTEPPS ensures future graduate nurses experience a culture of teamwork and civility from preceptors during orientation (Krivanke et al., 2020).

In developing a nurse residency program, Hillman and Foster (2011) found preceptors had varying levels of experience and training. Preceptors' willingness to serve in the role and lead activities, such as organizing orientation, also varied. The consistency of and preparedness of preceptors was a focus of this nurse residency program. The nurse residency program focused on selecting willing and experienced preceptors, launching a mandatory workshop for preceptors, and creating a preceptor committee to facilitate support and resources. An annual program delivered recognition and gratitude to preceptors for having the commitment to development of new nurses. Results demonstrated an increase in nurse retention from 50% to 72.5% in this facility. Support of and training for preceptors and mentors enriches quality and aids in the development of new graduate and novice nurse's practice. Nurse residency programs

have demonstrated success in ensuring preceptors are properly trained, motivated, and supported through orientation (Hillman and Foster (2011). Properly trained, motivated, and supported preceptors further support the effective orientation for new graduate nurses to achieve successful transition to practice.

Education

Nursing is a profession in which education and learning are continuous. This is especially important to the development of the novice nurse and a key theme in the literature review. Hillman and Foster (2011) found that education need varies; depending on what nursing program nurses came from. Curriculum content and clinical opportunities vary academic program to academic program. This makes it important to provide quality and consistent education during new graduate transition programs.

Lin et al. (2014) found value in continuing educational opportunities for new graduate nurses, particularly in strengthening skills for a smooth progression from academia to practice. Brooks et al. (2019) found "several methods of education, including classroom instruction, observational experience, coaching, and computer-based learning...for the newly qualified nurse were optimal" (p.56). According to Goode et al., AACN baccalaureate programs call for residency programs that focus on primary education and support for new nurses (2013). Van Camp and Chappy (2017) indicate providing rich educational experience and support strengthens the transition of new nurses into practice. Friedman et al. (2013) describes a pediatric nurse fellowship program focused on multiple educational opportunities during a 52-week orientation. Educational opportunities included simulations, meetings, and educational sessions with a master fellow and seminars with focus groups. Through implementation of these strategies, retention increased from 84% to 94% and a cost savings of $2,184,000 was found through improved

retention. Trepanier et al. (2012) describe an orientation model in which new nurses spend 15-20% of orientation time in didactic instruction that incorporates case studies. In this model, core concepts and competencies within specific nursing specialties were applied. They saw an increase in retention and it was estimated to save $15,228,000 across the 15 hospitals. Education and learning are especially important for new graduate nurses as they enter the profession in the novice stage of nursing. These articles indicated that programs that put an emphasis and support education opportunities for new graduate nurses have seen increased competency and retention in these nurses.

Leadership Opportunities

Leadership was one of the core aspects included in curriculums aimed to promote nurse retention. Leadership is a core curriculum component and student-learning outcome of many nursing programs. Yet, the further development of leadership skills and identifying opportunities to engage, become involved, and advance oneself are important to many new nurses. Leadership opportunities can also increase new nurse's self-confidence (Mills et al., 2017). Hillman and Foster (2011) describe a nurse residency program focused on leadership and personal development and growth opportunities of new nurses. The program included opportunities for volunteer experiences and quality improvement projects for new nurses. Goode et al. (2013) found that building on and enhancing leadership skills was a significant predictor of the nurse's commitment to not only their current position but also to the nursing career. Overall, including leadership and personal development as a focus of orientation allowed new nurses to feel connected to their organization and confident in their role.

Mills et al. (2017) surveyed new nurses for five years, starting the first year after graduation. There were six self-concepts surveyed, one of which was leadership. The leadership

self-concept produced the lowest scores in the first year and highest scores in year five. Mills et al. (2017) also found a moderate correlation between nurse manager abilities and support of nurses and nurse retention. Hernandez et al. (2020) report program partnership between the University of New Mexico Hospitals (UNMH) and the University of New Mexico College of Nursing internship program. One of the six goals of the internship program was leadership development. The internship program was considered successful with 85.6% of the interns hired at UNMH post-graduation. Leadership as a core component of nurse's orientation programs allows for opportunities to advance within the role as new nurse. Leadership and personal growth opportunities have been associated with nurse self-concept and, in turn, a commitment to remain within the organization (Goode et al., 2013).

Nurse Residency Programs

Nurse residency programs (NRPs) were discussed in seven of the ten articles and reviewed carefully. Characteristics of NRPs varied across articles but themes exist. Quality preceptors and mentors, educational class times, and having a leadership focus were important aspects of many programs. The aim of NRPs is to close the practice gap between novice and experienced nurses. This includes a structured program of education, clinical training by experienced nurse preceptors, and mentorship. Such programs were found to increase retention of new nurses and increase patient quality of care and safety (Van Camp and Chappy, 2017). Goode et al. (2013) retrospectively studies 10 years of a NRP and found nurse resident confidence and competence significantly increased over a yearlong program. Self-reported confidence Casey-Fink scores changed from 3.04 at program start to 3.24 at program completion ($p <.001$), indicating improved practice confidence following the NRP. The retention rates of

nurse residents also increased from 88% to 94.6% over the 10-year period the NRP was delivered.

Friedman et al. (2013) describe a NRP conducted within a pediatric unit. New hires were placed in a cohort and completed three semesters of a NRP. The semesters included learning activities of simulation, seminar, clinical pathways, preceptor assignments, bring back days, and individual patient assignments. An increase in retention ($p= 0.007$) and cost savings of $2,184,000 were found (Friedman et al., 2013). Hillman and Foster (2011) found a five-year new graduate nurse retention rate increase from 50% to 72.5% on their pediatric unit through the application of a NRP. Starting the NRP required a change in the unit culture with more focus on supporting student-to-staff transition, increasing retention, validating competence/confidence, and creating professionalism. Hernandez et al. (2020) describe a unique NRP that is partnered with a local nursing school; the NRP subsequently hires directly through the internship program. Retention rates were 85.6% for graduate nurses at one year after implementation.

Brooks et al. (2019) completed a systematic review of 53 articles exploring ways to improve nurse retention. Many articles included NRPs or components used in NRPs, such as education focus, preceptor or mentor components, and opportunities for advancement. The final recommendation from this review is that internships/nurse residency programs are most effective when 27-52 weeks in duration. Lin et al. (2014) studied factors influencing job satisfaction and retention. Findings support a cohort model of NRPs is supportive for new nurses. Cohort models create groups of new graduate nurses that start and end orientation at the same time. New graduate nurses also meet in this group for classes, social gatherings, and information sessions. The study found a sense of belonging and support from peers promotes job satisfaction among new graduate nurses (Lin et al., 2014). A main component of many NRPs explored in this

literature review is the grouping of new hires in cohorts, especially for educational class times and trainings. This allows new graduates to experience the program together and gain a sense of belonging and community (Lin et al., 2014).

Nurse residency programs were found to be successful in transitioning new graduate nurses into the nursing profession, as well as increasing retention rates. NRPs incorporate many of the key elements of other strategies that have successfully improved retention rates. Developing quality preceptors and mentors, educational class offerings, and having a focus on leadership development were prominent. Further, some NRPs were noted to incorporate some of these strategies.

Synthesis of Literature Reviewed

A variety of bodies of knowledge and evidence levels were included in this literature review. Multiple high-level systematic reviews were reviewed and further critically appraised in Appendices A-C. The remaining studies were primarily experimental studies with site-specific interventions and data. While qualitative studies were not included in this review, many of the articles had qualitative components to gain insight on new graduate nurses' perceptions and viewpoints on interventions. Many articles support that interventions focused on developing quality preceptors and mentors, providing education, fostering leadership opportunities, and implementing nurse residency programs improve retention rates. Such strategies not only demonstrated improved retention among new graduate nurses, but also cost savings.

Gaps in evidence

While many of the studies explored were high level, gaps in evidence remain. The main limitations of the literature reviewed are the convenience sampling, cohort sampling, and retrospective evaluation among the selected studies. These methods limit the ability to generalize

and implement to a larger population. Cost specific findings were based on program structures, local salaries, and economic impact of location and makes generalizability to larger populations difficult. Although articles were published in the last ten years, many of the systematic reviews collected data based on the ten years prior; therefore, these data may be outdated and not reflective of current trends. There is need for additional studies in this area to reflect current data.

Conceptual Framework

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977) is a subset of his Social Cognitive Theory. Self-efficacy is described as a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation (Lopez-Garrido, 2020). Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory identifies four sources of influence that helps individuals achieve self-efficacy. The first is performance accomplishment and is based on the idea that practice and performing something new, and being successful in that, increases efficacy. The second influence is vicarious experiences. This refers to observing others, who you view as similar, complete and excel in experiences or tasks. Through observation you, too, can complete and excel at the given experience or task. This often is seen in the role of mentors or role models. Verbal persuasion is the third influence and includes positive feedback and encouragement. The final influence is physiological feedback. This includes physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. These factors influence one's perception of self-efficacy. This can be influenced by fatigue, anxiety, depression, and other similar factors (Lopez-Garrido, 2020).

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory was chosen as the conceptual model for this work as it aligns with supporting new graduate nurse competency and improved retention. Multiple studies in this review of literature found new graduate nurse retention is improved with development of quality preceptors and mentors. Preceptors and mentors provide vicarious experiences and verbal

persuasion that is important for the development of self-efficacy in new graduate nurses. Education and nurse residency programs also present new graduate nurses with the opportunity to accomplish performance as a nurse (Goode et al., 2013).

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations for Nursing

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to review and identify best practices to increase new graduate nurse retention in the acute care setting, using the question, what are effective strategies and interventions to increase new graduate nurse retention in the acute care setting? After completion of the literature review the following conclusions, implications, and recommendations were established for nursing. The development of quality preceptors/mentors, education, leadership, and nurse residency programs are all successful in increasing new graduate nurse retention in the acute care setting.

Conclusions

The literature review comprised ten scholarly articles, including three systematic reviews. The proposed question asked was, what are effective strategies and interventions to increase new graduate nurse retention in the acute care setting? It was found that new graduate nurse retention rates were higher in healthcare facilities that focus orientation on quality preceptors and mentors, educational class times, and those with a leadership focus. These components were key elements of many NRPs, a structured, comprehensive approach to supporting the transition of new graduate nurses from the academic setting to the practice setting. NRPs utilize a cohort model of learning and support that appeals to the current generational values of new graduate nurses. Overall, NRPs have demonstrated success in increasing new graduate nurse retention.

Implications for Nursing

It is essential acute health care facilities continue to recognize the impact and challenges of new graduate nurse retention rates, including cost savings. Hillman and Foster (2011) reported a cost savings of 4 million dollars in 4 years, equating to $50,000 per nurse. Successful orientation of new graduate nurses will mitigate risk of nurses leaving an organization and/or the field of nursing. Orientation has been found successful when it is focused on developing quality preceptors and mentors, educational class times, and has a leadership focus. A structured and comprehensive approach, including these components is the NRP. NRPs have been studied and demonstrated improved retention rates as far-reaching as 82% to 94% change (Friedman et al., 2013). NRPs incorporating strategies focused on developing quality preceptors/mentors, educational class times, and leadership focus and applying a cohort model supports new graduate nurses, creates a sense of community, and improves retention.

Recommendations

The implementation of a NRP for new graduate nurses is recommended. Such a program is supported by the evidence and shall include aims of quality preceptors and mentors, educational class times, and focus on leadership. Brooks et al. (2019) reported positive outcomes through a systematic review with many articles supporting the effectiveness of NRPs, which included components such as education focus, preceptor/mentor components, and opportunities for leadership/advancement.

This NRP shall start with hiring new graduate nurses three times a year in order to create cohorts. The program will be one year in duration. Preceptors for the program will be motivated to participate, attend preceptor workshops, and complete continued education sessions. Program content should focus on creating consistency between preceptors and utilizing Bandura's Self-Efficacy theory to facilitate the new graduate nurse's self efficacy.

Another important element is to include orientation days for the new graduate and preceptor within the unit. Educational class time as a cohort will be scheduled throughout the year and comprised of class instruction days, simulation days, hands-on skill days, and case study learning. Educational days will commence with cohort time to share, reflect, and support one another to bolster an environment of community. Opportunities to shadow various leadership roles, such as charge nurse, managers, and house supervisors will be built into the program timeline. Nurses in the program will also learn from various committees, unit councils, and special assignment members about potential areas to become involved in a leadership aspect.

The NRP will be evaluated for effectiveness and quality by measuring retention rates of nurses in the program yearly from years one to five. Nurses who complete the program will be asked to complete a survey on their experience in the program and perspectives of self-efficacy. The Casey-Fink Readiness for Practice Survey will be administered at the beginning of the NRP and at the end for each new graduate nurse. This survey will provide information on each new graduate nurses' change in confidence as a nurse, skill sets, communication, and other aspects of the nursing role (Casey and Fink, 2021). The goal of this NRP is to increase new graduate nurse retention in the acute care setting through applying best practice strategies of designing orientation, fostering community among new graduate nurses, and promoting self-efficacy of the new graduate nurse population.

Summary

Nurse retention is a significant problem affecting health care facilities around the country, where average turnover is around 15% (Brook et al., 2019). Turnover leads to organizational financial loss, decreased nurse morale, and safety and quality concerns for patients. The literature reviewed as part of this SIP focused on identifying strategies and

interventions to increase new graduate nurse retention rates in the acute care setting. Identified themes include quality preceptors and mentors, educational class times, leadership focus, and nurse residency programs. Nurse residency programs yielding improved retention rates were most often found to have incorporated all the identified themes. These findings led to recommending the development of a NRP with the identified evidence-supported components, to increase new graduate nurse retention rates in acute care settings.

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Table 1

Databases Searched and Data Abstraction

Search Date	Row ID	Key Words	Dates Included in Search	Database/Sources Used	# of Hits Listed	# of Hits Reviewed	# of Hits Used
2/1/21	1	Nurse retention	2010-now	CINHAL/Ebsco	11,139	10	1
2/8/21	2	Nurse retention + acute care	2010-now	CINHAL/Ebsco	428	3	1
2/8/21	3	Nurse retention + acute care	2010-now	ProQuest	53,248	15	2
2/9/21	4	Nurse retention + strategies	2010-now	ProQuest	118,508	8	3
2/9/21	35	nurse retention + nurse residency	2010-now	CINHAL/Ebsco	292	3	2
2/15/21	6	Nurse retention strategies	2010-now	CINHAL/Ebsco	1,656	3	1
2/15/21	7	New graduate nurse retention	2010-now	CINAHL/Ebsco	971	2	1

Table 2

Literature Tables