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Enhancement of a Peer Mentorship Program for Student Registered Nurse Anesthetist

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Executive Summary

Introduction of the Problem

Student registered nurse anesthetists (SRNAs) experience a great deal of stress while in school. Around two-thirds of SRNAs reported moderate to high-level stress and anxiety (Mesica & Mainwaring, 2021). Abnormally high levels of stress can harm an individual. Peer mentorship programs provide students with an outlet to deal with increased stress levels. Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Nurse Anesthesia program has an established peer mentorship program; however, the program has areas for improvement. Thus, an expansive literature review and survey was conducted to make recommendations on ways to improve the existing peer mentorship program.

Literature Review

The definition of peer mentorship is a mutually beneficial relationship between an individual with experience and one without (Head, 2015; Leung et al., 2012). The experienced individual is known as the mentor, and the person without experience is the mentee (Leung et al., 2012). Mentees should be honest and passionate about their future careers (Grost & Brooks, 2013). Mentors should be approachable, nonjudgmental, and good at active listening (Grost & Brooks, 2013).

One potential area for improvement within the mentorship program was to strengthen the relationship between mentor and mentee. Matching individuals based on values, beliefs, and location was advantageous to the pair, but matching just based on skill and demographics was not (Nowell et al., 2017). Mentorship programs can provide a positive multicultural experience. Mentors originally described fears and apprehension when matched with a mentor of a different

culture; however, by the end of the peer mentorship, they reported a positive experience (Hagqvist et al., 2020).

Faculty members are a major part of student's academic lives and are excellent resources. Faculty is helpful when students are transitioning into their careers (Infosino & Ferschl, 2020). However, when it comes to mentorship, horizontal mentoring (peer-to-peer) is more effective for stress management and ease of advice exchange (Chan, 2021; Plyley et al., 2020). Graduate programs are grueling; thus, finding the optimal balance of structure is important. When there is too much structure in a peer mentorship program, mentors could be negatively impacted, but having some structure in the program provides the students with less anxiety (Arenas and Brisson, 2020; Haqquee et al., 2020).

The literature noted many ways to evaluate an existing peer mentorship program. The program could be assessed by distributing surveys to both parties or just one member of the mentor-mentee relationship (Danzi et al., 2020; Haqquee et al., 2020; Plyley et al., 2020). Surveys also allow participants to maintain anonymity (Plyley et al., 2020). Additionally, the survey should collect information about interactions between mentor-mentee and other aspects of the program, like goal setting (Haqquee et al., 2020; Plyley et al., 2020).

Project Methods

This project's overall goal was to improve the current peer mentorship program at the university. To reach this goal, the project had three main objectives. First, review the current literature about peer mentorship programs. Second, develop and distribute a survey assessing the current peer mentorship program. The last objective was to make recommendations to the university on ways to improve the program based on the literature review and survey results.

The project's host facility was the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Nurse Anesthesia program. The sample population was SRNAs in the program. The project was submitted to IRB at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and deemed quality improvement and was exempt from further review. An electronic Qualtrics survey was distributed to the students for completion. The survey was completely voluntary.

Evaluation

The survey was developed on Qualtrics. The survey contained multiple-choice, Likert scale, and fill-in-the-blank questions. Qualtrics was utilized to analyze the participants' responses. The survey contained questions about how often communication was taking place between mentor and mentees. The results of these two questions were quite alarming. Seventy-five percent of mentees stated that they had not contacted their mentor or had only made contact once in the past semester. Thirty-three percent of mentors had not reached out to their mentees. The same number stated they reached out to their mentees at least once a month, and 27% said they reached out once a semester. Since the literature showed that adding structure to the mentorship program may be beneficial, the participants were asked how they felt about more structure. Thirty-eight percent favored more structure, 27% did not want more structure, and 35% were unsure if they wanted more structure.

The survey gathered information on whether the students would like to have other mentors besides a peer. Eighty-five percent of the participants said they would like a practicing CRNA mentor during their last year of the anesthesia program. The respondents were also asked if having a faculty mentor would be beneficial. A little over half, 56%, indicated they think having a faculty mentor would be helpful. Seventy percent of the students felt that matching with

a mentor or mentee with a similar background and life experiences would foster a more effective relationship. The remaining 30% of students responded that matching may or may not help.

This project had limitations. The Qualtrics survey had a low response rate. The sample size was small, which created fewer data. Finally, the means by which the survey was delivered created a limitation in that questions had to be formatted in a specific way, which resulted in vague and confusing answers.

Impact on Practice

Peer mentorship has been shown to have a positive impact on both mentors and mentees. Therefore, nurse anesthesia programs should consider implementing peer mentorship programs as part of their student development strategy. By providing opportunities for anesthesia students to mentor and be mentored, organizations can foster a culture of continuous learning and development. This can result in increased engagement, productivity, and retention, as well as improved organizational performance overall. Additionally, peer mentorship can provide a valuable networking opportunity for students and faculty, which can lead to new ideas, collaboration, and innovation within the organization.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this doctoral project on peer mentorship in graduate nurse anesthesia has revealed valuable insights that can inform improvements to existing programs. The results of the survey suggest that students would prefer to be matched with a mentor who has a similar background and life experiences, and that there is significant interest in connecting with practicing CRNAs outside of the program. Despite limitations, the project was able to produce recommendations for improving the mentorship program, including providing more structure to the program, assigning mentors at the beginning of the program, and increasing faculty

involvement. Additionally, the project identified potential areas for future study, such as exploring the degree of faculty involvement in the program and investigating how to integrate CRNA mentors into the existing program. By implementing the recommended improvements and conducting further research, this project has the potential to significantly enhance the peer mentorship program for graduate nurse anesthesia students, improving their personal and professional development, reducing stress and anxiety, and ultimately fostering their success in the field.

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