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Mentorship Program Including Alumni

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Nurse Anesthesia Programs (NAPs) represent a pivotal step in the professional development of SRNAs, presenting a rigorous educational and clinical training framework that far exceeds the requirements of traditional nursing roles (Morstatt, 2020). The transition from competent ICU nurses to novice learners in a highly specialized field imposes a unique array of stressors, affecting not only the SRNAs' educational journey but also their personal lives, particularly for those with family and financial responsibilities (Mesisca & Mainwaring, 2021). Within this context, the potential for alumni mentorship emerges as a strategy to mitigate these challenges. The integration of alumni into peer-to-peer mentorship programs has been posited as a means to enhance student experiences and benefit from the insights of those who have successfully navigated the NAP pathway (Dollinger et al., 2019). This paper reviews the literature on stressors specific to NAPs, evaluates the impact of mentorship, and investigates the incorporation of alumni in mentorship initiatives as a beneficial factor for current students.

Literature Review

In the context of resuming advanced educational programs, SRNAs face significant challenges due to the demanding nature of Nurse Anesthesia Programs (NAPs), which require a minimum of 2000 clinical hours as mandated by the Council on Accreditation, a stark contrast to the 500 clinical hours of traditional nursing programs. These requirements and the suggestion to cease ICU nursing practices impose considerable stress, particularly on SRNAs with familial and financial obligations (Morstatt, 2020; Mesisca & Mainwaring, 2021). Transitioning from experienced ICU nurses to novice learners in NAPs also adds to this stress (Mesisca &

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Mainwaring, 2021; Rivera & Conner, 2019). To alleviate these challenges, peer-to-peer mentoring is proposed as an effective strategy, though research on integrating alumni into these programs remains scarce (Dollinger et al., 2019; Morstatt, 2020).

The literature review aimed to identify stressors specific to graduate nurse anesthesia programs and evaluate whether alumni mentorship programs enhance student experiences and benefit from alumni involvement. As defined by the APA (2013), mentorship serves a dual purpose of career guidance and psychosocial support. Effective mentorship involves peer-to-peer interaction and alumni participation, which can provide insight into board exam preparation and post-graduation success (Dollinger et al., 2019).

The search strategy encompassed several databases, including CINHALL and MEDLINE, focusing on articles from the past six years with an expansion of foundational texts, such as the APA's definition of mentorship from 2013. The literature revealed various stressors for SRNAs, from academic to personal, with studies indicating that stress can negatively impact well-being and performance, although clinical performance may not be as affected (Mesisca & Mainwaring, 2021; Chan, 2022; Horvath & Grass, 2021; Downey et al., 2017).

Mentorship within NAPs has been shown to reduce stress and enhance student well-being, with peer-to-peer and alumni mentorship programs providing support and guidance through shared experiences and networks (Rivera & Conner, 2019; Chan, 2022). Alumni mentorship benefits all parties involved—mentees, mentors, and the university—by fostering connections and satisfying the mentees' needs (Dollinger et al., 2019; Morstatt, 2020). While the efficacy of mentorship programs in reducing stress and burnout in SRNAs is acknowledged, the potential of alumni involvement after graduation is a promising avenue that warrants further exploration (Dollinger et al., 2019).

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Project Methods

The approach for this initiative involved distributing a questionnaire to former students in May 2023 to determine their interest in continuing interactions with present students and to assess the suitable duration for such mentorship roles. Participants were required to submit their personal email addresses to facilitate communication, leading to their inclusion in a Facebook group encompassing current students from the graduating batches of 2024 to 2026. This platform allowed alumni to guide their juniors, aiming to boost the quality and overall satisfaction with the mentorship initiative. Furthermore, the advisability of involving alumni from the 2022 and 2023 graduating cohorts was suggested for consideration.

In January 2024, a follow-up survey was issued to evaluate the impact of adding alumni as mentors by capturing the contentment of current students and alumni who participated. This questionnaire aimed to gather insights into whether recent adjustments had improved the mentorship program and included inquiries such as whether the alumni's presence had heightened student contentment and achievement within the SIUE NAP Mentorship Program and the extent of weekly communication between mentors and mentees. The collective responses from these two groups were instrumental in assessing the initiative's success, deciding whether to sustain the recent modifications, and identifying potential improvements to elevate the program's effectiveness further.

Evaluation

The program SIUE Alumni Mentorship Program enlisted alumni as mentors and used social media for coordination. An initial survey gathered demographic data and gauged alumni interest and preferred engagement frequency, revealing a high willingness for long-term participation, although actual alumni involvement was low. The follow-up survey gathered data

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from 75 participants and revealed broader perspectives. A significant number of these participants saw the integration of alumni into the mentorship program as beneficial: 44% reported enhanced satisfaction, 36% indicated a potential boost in satisfaction, and 20% felt there was no change. Communication was infrequent, mainly monthly or less, which aligned with the initial survey's findings, where such infrequent contact was preferred. Regarding weekly communication time, 54% engaged with their mentor or mentee for five minutes or less, 14% for 10-20 minutes, 3% for 30-40 minutes, and 30% interacted monthly or less often. These figures point to a possible gap in connection between mentors and mentees or a general lack of active participation in the program.

Initial recruitment did not reach recent graduates, resulting in limited alumni participation. Facebook was chosen for communication based on class groups, with the class of 2024 being the most active. Other classes engaged differently, indicating a potential mismatch between the platform used and students' communication preferences.

To improve the program, participants suggested diversified communication methods, more structured interactions, varied mentor interests, proactive alumni outreach, and physical events. The study concluded that while alumni participation was seen as beneficial, there's a clear need for broader recruitment, diverse communication methods, and a mandatory interaction schedule that is better for supporting Student Registered Nurse Anesthetists (SRNAs).

Impact on Practice

Incorporating alumni into Nurse Anesthesia graduate mentorship programs through a well-structured framework, which includes regular, mandated interactions and diverse communication channels, can enhance the educational experience for current students. This integration fosters increased confidence and satisfaction by facilitating access to mentors with

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firsthand knowledge of the program's rigors. Furthermore, it allows alumni to sustain engagement with their alma mater, nurturing a sense of belonging within the academic community. By guiding current students, alumni can effectively complement the efforts of the institution's faculty, thereby enriching the support system available to students. By sharing their unique insights and experiences, alumni mentors offer invaluable contributions to the mentorship program, potentially elevating student contentment and mitigating the stresses associated with intensive academic programs.

Conclusion

Incorporating alumni into NAP mentorship programs holds substantial promise for enhancing the educational experience of SRNAs. Despite the implementation challenges, alumni mentorship's benefits are multifaceted, offering psychosocial support, career guidance, and a network of professionals who share a common background. The present study indicates that alumni mentorship can lead to increased satisfaction among SRNAs; however, the full potential of these programs is not yet realized due to low alumni participation and infrequent communication. To harness the benefits of alumni mentorship, programs should consider adopting diverse communication methods, structured interactions, proactive alumni outreach, and mandatory interaction schedules. Such enhancements can strengthen the support system for SRNAs, reduce stress, and improve overall program satisfaction. The impact on practice is clear: a well-structured alumni mentorship program can enrich the SRNA educational journey, providing a robust and multifaceted support network crucial for navigating the rigorous demands of NAPs.

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