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New Graduate Nurse Professional Development Planning

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New Graduate Nurse Professional Development Planning: Key to Retention

Executive Summary

Introduction

As new graduate nurses (NGRNs) transition into their professional nursing role, they must meet the standards of practice defined by their professional organization by demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to obtain competency in the nursing field (ANCC, 2020). In alignment with American Nurse's Credentialing Center's (ANCC) (2020) criteria for Transition to Practice (TTP) programs, organizations must ensure NGRNs have an individualized longitudinal plan addressing identified gaps. Likewise, incremental goals should be used within the longitudinal plan for NGRNs to ensure individualized goals are met.

A longitudinal plan is one that outlines how a NGRNs can address identified gaps in competency as they transition to their professional role. The lack of a formal process to identify a longitudinal plan with incremental goals leaves NGRNs feeling unsupported in their journey from novice to expert. It is estimated that approximately 35-60% of NGRNs leave their job within the first year of employment (Van Camp & Chappy, 2017). NGRNs who have regular touchpoints with leaders are less likely to leave their place of employment (Koneri et al., 2021).

A 150-bed urban hospital in Chicago, Illinois lacked a formal process within the TTP Program to assist NGRNs in developing incremental goals as a part of their longitudinal plan during their first year of professional nursing practice. Therefore, the purpose of this project was to implement regular touchpoint meetings that included professional development planning to increase NGRNs' feeling of support during their transition, address individualized needs, and ultimately increase retention.

Literature Review

Transition to Practice for New Graduate Nurses

Formal TTP programs, or nurse residencies, have been shown to benefit NGRNs as they begin their professional nursing career (Van Camp & Chappy, 2017). Many programs span six months to a year after hire and provide a standardized curriculum that all NGRNs complete including topics such as communication, critical thinking, nursing ethics, and time management. The COVID-19 pandemic forced nursing leaders across the United States to explore additional methods to support nurses. Many TTP programs were paused or modified during the pandemic due to social distancing guidelines and increased staffing needs (Gallagher & Kopps, 2022). This left NGRNs feeling alone and unsupported during their transition. Recent NGRNs identified the need for additional support, guidance and teaching related to changes in their academic clinical experience during the pandemic (Smith et al., 2021). NGRNs feel like they are “Drowning, a lot of the time” and need additional support to aid in their transition to their new role (Jenkins et al., 2021, 2927).

Professional Development and Touchpoint Program

Professional development is a crucial part of an individual’s nursing career. According to Shinnars and Graebe (2021), professional development begins in school and continues through a nurse's career, including time as a NGRN. Nurses have a significant increase in professional development activities between one and three years after hire (Shinnars et al., 2021). Shinnars and colleagues noted NGRN participation in activities such as being a preceptor, mentor, and subject matter expert occur in their first three years of practice (2021). In addition, new graduates are likely to become involved with professional organizations and seek certification in the same time frame. According to Shinnars et al. (2021), NGRNs often do not know where to start with professional development, and it is helpful if a leader assists in guiding them in the correct direction. Leaders can encourage participation in committees, provide information about upcoming classes, and support development in advanced roles such as becoming a preceptor.

Tucker and colleagues (2019) recognized the importance of professional development and its impact on NGRN retention. After the pilot implementation of formal professional development planning meetings with NGRNs, Tucker and colleagues (2019) found that only one in eight NGRNs left their position, as opposed to three nurses the previous year. Koneri et al. (2021) initiated a touchpoint program for NGRNs that included a sub-focus on professional development. The researchers found when compared to nine previous NGRN cohorts that had a significant loss in NGRNs over the first 20-month period, the cohort with scheduled touchpoints, including professional development, remained steady, and only lost one NGRN during the 20-month period following hire.

Project Methods

The project aim was to implement regular professional development planning meetings, like the touchpoints initiated by Tucker and colleagues (2019) with NGRNs to improve their intent to stay within the organization and feelings of support during their transition to practice. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and OSF HealthCare prior to project implementation. Professional development meetings were led by a nurse educator or professional development coordinator who was identified as a First Year Coach. First Year Coaches must have an MSN or be enrolled in an MSN accredited program. First Year Coaches functioned like mentors whose purpose was to assist NGRNs in goal development and strategies to grow professionally to meet professional goals. First Year Coaches received eight hours of education including topics on communication strategies and goal setting. In addition, First Year Coaches had regular meetings with the project leader for ongoing support. Eight First Year Coaches completed the initial training.

During professional development meetings, NGRNs completed a self-assessment based on the organization's standardized competency tool. The First Year Coach tracked attendance and discussed recent successes, barriers, and goals. Lastly, First Year Coaches and NGRNs explored professional

development opportunities that aligned with identified areas of growth and developed goals surrounding the professional development opportunities identified.

NGRNs hired into nursing roles at the facility between June and August of 2022 were enrolled in the organization's already established NGRN TTP Program and were eligible to participate in the project. Participation in professional development planning meetings was highly encouraged; however, remained optional for NGRN's enrolled in the TTP program. Upon enrollment, NGRNs were introduced to all program components including the projects regularly scheduled professional development planning meetings with a First Year Coach. After NGRNs were enrolled in the TTP Program, they began regular meetings with a First Year Coach. The first meeting took place no later than the fourth week after hire. Professional Development planning meetings continued monthly throughout the remainder of their first six months.

Individuals who did not respond to the initial request to schedule a professional development meeting were sent monthly reminders to schedule the meeting. In addition, the First Year Coach met with department leaders to discuss individual participation in meetings. The First Year Coach was not a formal leader for the NGRNs; therefore, accountability to attend meetings was the responsibility of the unit leader and the participant.

At the initial meeting, a self-assessment was completed, and one to three goals were developed by the NGRN. The First Year Coach helped identify activities for the NGRN to assist in meeting goals. After a goal was met, the First Year Coach assisted in the creation of a new goal. Goals during the first three months were very specific to individual skills NGRNs sought to master such as chest tube care or intravenous insertion; however, as time progressed and new goals were developed, NGRNs began identifying larger goals to work towards like enrolling in the preceptor education program or professional nursing certification.

The evaluation of NGRN professional development planning meetings incorporated four components: specific data points from the Casey Fink New Graduate Nurse Experience Survey©, participation rates in professional development planning meetings, an online questionnaire examining intent to participate in future professional development activities, and intent to stay at the organization.

The Casey Fink Graduate Nurse Experience Survey© is a 5-section survey that is widely used across the United States to evaluate the NGRN's experience. The Casey Fink Graduate Nurse Experience Survey© is used to evaluate the overall experience NGRNs have when transitioning to their professional nursing role (Casey et al., 2004). The project leader administered the survey to project participants at the time of TTP Program enrollment and at 6 months after hire. Permission was granted to use the Casey Fink Graduate Nurse Experience Survey© by the University of Colorado Hospital Authority. The nine NGRNs who participated in at least one professional development planning meeting completed the Casey Fink New Graduate Nurse Experience Survey© assigned six months after hire. In addition, NGRNs received a confidential online survey upon enrollment in the TTP Program and six months after hire to evaluate intent to participate in future professional development activities. NGRNs were also asked if they intended to stay at the organization for the remainder of their first year and three years after hire.

Evaluation

The project goal was to improve NGRN intent to stay within the organization and feelings of support during their transition to practice. In addition, the relationship between professional development meeting attendance, participation in other TTP program requirements, and intent to participate in future professional development activities was explored. Each new graduate worked with one consistent First Year Coach throughout the project period. The First Year Coach tracked participation and attendance at the meetings throughout the NGRN's first year. Of the N=15 NGRNs enrolled in the TTP Program upon hire, 40% (n=6) of NGRNs attended regular monthly professional development planning meetings and completed all other additional required elements within the TTP

program. An additional 20% (n=3) of NGRNs attended at least one meeting. Forty percent (n=6) of NGRNs opted out of the TTP and professional development meetings. Unfortunately, the six NGRNs who opted out of attending the professional development planning meetings did not complete the required elements outlined as a part of the TTP Program.

Results from the Casey Fink Graduate Nurse Experience Survey© showed that 100 % (n=9) NGRNs who participated in professional development planning meetings felt supported in their new role and had positive role models to observe on their units. In addition, 89% (n=8) were moderately satisfied with the amount of feedback they received, and 55% (n=5) were moderately satisfied with their opportunities for growth. When asked what could be done to help them feel more supported on their unit, 55% (n=5) reported an improved work environment, 67% (n=6) reported improved orientation, and 33% (n=3) reported unit socialization. The survey was dispersed to NGRNs who did not attend professional development planning meetings; however, no responses were received.

The confidential online survey distributed to NGRNs explored their intent to participate in future professional development opportunities at their organization. Specifically, new graduates were asked if they intended to participate in the organization's professional development program, obtain a professional nursing certification, participate in the preceptor program, and fulfill the preceptor role after completion of their first year of practice. Forty-four percent (n=4) of NGRNs surveyed reported they intended to participate in the organization's professional development program. In addition, 89% (n=8) of NGRNs surveyed planned to obtain a professional nursing certification, and 78% (n=7) reported they intended to become a preceptor.

NGRN retention rate among nurses who participated in the TTP Program with professional development planning meetings was calculated. One hundred percent of NGRNs (n=9) who participated in professional development planning meetings remained employed six months after hire and voiced

intent to stay for at least one year. Seventy-eight percent (n=7) of the new graduates reported an intent to stay for at least three years.

A limitation of this project included a small sample size, and the lack of program participation in professional development planning meetings by six individuals enrolled in the TTP Program. Additional data collection at 12 and 18 months would provide further insight on project goals and new graduate retention. Furthermore, the project leader plans to monitor retention for the NGRNs who did not participate in the TPP and Professional Development planning meetings on nurse retention at one year.

Impact on Practice

Implementation of monthly Professional Development Planning meetings as a part of the TTP Program for NGRNs had a positive impact on NGRNs who regularly participated in meetings with First Year Coaches as evidenced by their reported feeling of support during their transition into practice, and their intent to stay with the organization. All NGRNs who participated in professional development planning meetings noted increased support would better their experience as a NGRN. In addition, the majority (89% or n=8) of NGRNs participating in the project felt the support they received was a satisfying part of their new role. While further investigation is needed, early data suggested professional development meetings with the support of a First Year Coach during the first year of practice may increase new NGRN retention, overall TTP program participation, feelings of support, and future professional development activity participation.

Conclusion

TTP Programs for NGRNs are an integral part of a NGRN's transition into their professional nursing role. The inclusion of individualized professional development planning meetings as a component of Transition to Practice Programs has the potential to positively impact the NGRN experience, retention, and future involvement in professional development activities. While it is difficult to determine if professional development planning meetings or if the program in its entirety influenced

the NGRN's experience; engagement in the professional development planning meetings also increased overall TTP Program participation. Facilities looking to increase engagement in their TTP program, retention, NGRNs' perception of support, and future professional development activity participation should consider the inclusion of regular, individualized professional development planning meetings to the onboarding experience for NGRN.