Evaluation of Nurse Residency Program: It Leads to Higher Job Satisfaction and Less Turnover

Evaluation of a nursing post-baccalaureate residency program

**SUMMARY**

The purpose of this project was to refine and implement an evaluation of the nurse residency program sponsored by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing and the University HealthSystem Consortium. The nurse residency program is a one-year program designed to support bachelor-degree nurses as they transition into their first professional positions.

**Key Findings**

Among the preliminary findings from the evaluation:

- Nurse residency program graduates expressed greater confidence, competence and mastery of their jobs over the course of the residency program.

- Nurse residency program graduates remained in their jobs for one year at significantly higher rates than did other first-year nurses nationally.

**Funding**

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provided $50,000 to support this unsolicited project from December 2003 through January 2005.

**THE PROBLEM**

Reports by several organizations, including the American Hospital Association and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, have called for the creation of residency programs in nursing similar to those that already exist for physicians. The objective is to enhance skills among new graduates, create supportive work environments, decrease errors in patient care and decrease turnover in nursing staff.
BACKGROUND

In June 2002, the University HealthSystem Consortium and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing instituted a nurse residency program at six sites. Six additional sites joined in 2003 and nine more in 2004. See Appendix 1 for a list of the 21 sites. The nurse residency program includes:

- A one-year standardized curriculum.
- Clinical experience under the guidance of a preceptor who functions as a teacher, advocate and role model for the resident.
- Access to a resident facilitator who provides guidance on professional development.
- Clinical experiences consistent with the resident's area of specialty.

The nurse residency program aims to help nurse residents:

- Transition from advanced beginner nurse toward competent professional nurse in the clinical environment.
- Develop effective decision-making skills related to clinical judgments and performance.
- Provide clinical leadership at the point of patient care.
- Strengthen their commitment to nursing as a professional career choice.
- Formulate an individual development plan related to the nurse's new clinical role.
- Incorporate research-based evidence into their practice.

These residency programs are costly and require employers to allocate financial, personnel and physical resources. In the current health care economy, employers who make efforts to enhance the work environment want to see cost and personnel benefits associated with these changes. Evaluation is a critical next step to ensuring long-term commitment to these programs.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing, located in Washington, is a national organization representing more than 580 schools of nursing at public and private universities and colleges nationwide. The University HealthSystem Consortium, located in Oak Brook, Ill., is an alliance of academic health centers situated mainly in the United States.

CONTEXT

RWJF issued this grant as part of its Quick Strikes initiative for nursing. The Quick Strikes Small Grants Program was designed to inform the work of the Nursing Team and
to further its strategic objectives. The Team's current objective is to reduce, by 2013, the shortage in nurse staffing and improve the quality of nursing-related care by transforming the way care is delivered at the bedside.

THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to refine and implement the evaluation plan for the nurse residency program sponsored by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing and the University HealthSystem Consortium. With RWJF funds, staff from the association and the consortium hired a consultant, Mary R. Lynn, PhD, from the University of North Carolina School of Nursing, and convened the Nurse Residency Program Outcomes Committee, which included Lynn, staff from the association, the consortium and consortium members. Together, the group worked to refine the evaluation plan used to assess whether the nurse residency program is meeting its objectives. (See Appendix 2 for a list of committee members.)

Among the questions the committee hoped to answer were:

- Do residents show significant improvement in the areas of competence, critical thinking, autonomy, work satisfaction and commitment during their 12 months in the program?
- Are residents in the program significantly different than other new graduates one year after employment in terms of their competence, critical thinking, autonomy, work satisfaction, professional satisfaction and commitment?
- How does the retention rate of the residents compare with national statistics on turnover/retention?
- How do the residents evaluate their professional development over the 12 months in the program?

Data were collected from residents at 11 sites at three times during the program: at program entry; at six months; and at 12 months. (See Appendix 1 for data collection sites.) Residents completed an evaluation instrument created under the current grant, as well as a series of standardized scales used in previous studies to assess satisfaction, professional development and retention rates among the resident nurses. Researchers collected traditional demographic data such as age, race and gender, as well as information on previous health care related experiences.

In 2004, six sites agreed to have newly hired nurses with four-year college degrees serve as control subjects for one year to aid the residency program evaluation. These six control sites joined the nurse residency program in 2005. See Appendix 3 for a list of the control sites.
FINDINGS

Lynn reported these preliminary findings from the ongoing evaluation in a February 2005 report entitled *UHC/AACN Nurse Residency Program Interim Outcomes Report 2005*. The findings are based on data collected from 434 residents enrolled in the program from May 2003 through October 2004. Data from the six control sites are expected in 2006.

- Nurse residency program graduates expressed greater confidence, competence and mastery of their jobs over the course of the residency program and an increase in their perceived ability to organize and prioritize.

- Nurse residency program graduates remained in their jobs for one year at significantly higher rates than those of first-year nurses nationally. The one-year retention rate of residents who entered the program before October 2003 was 87 percent (89% after excluding residents who failed the nurse licensing exams). In contrast, not quite 50 percent of first-year nurses remain in their job after one year.

- On average, residents rated their own professional growth as a three on a four-point scale. Forty percent of residents rated their growth as a four.

- The residents provided a positive evaluation of the nurse residency program in the areas of recruitment and welcome to their workplace institution, the program goals, their views of the program and the program curriculum and faculty. Additionally, the residents’ open-ended comments were primarily positive with negative comments coming mostly from residents in specialty areas, such as operating room nurses, who perceived many of the residency classes as less applicable to their specialty.

- Residents were less satisfied with their job at the end of the program than at the beginning. This finding is not unexpected, according to the project director, because the residents’ ivory-tower view at program entry is likely to be seriously jolted when they face the reality of their professional world. However, when data collected six months after graduation were compared with those after 12 months, there was no significant difference in job satisfaction, suggesting the initial decrease of job satisfaction in early residency did not continue.

Communications

The nurse residency program co-chairs Colleen J. Goode, RN, PhD, FAAN, vice president of patient services and chief nursing officer for the University of Colorado Hospital, and Carolyn A. Williams, RN, PhD, FAAN, dean, School of Nursing at the University of Kentucky, presented the project's findings at the University HealthSystem Consortium's Chief Nurses Officer meeting in Orlando, Fla., in January 2005 and to the Nursing Advisory Council of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations in June 2005.
LESSONS LEARNED

1. It is important to have a lot of different opinions around the table when developing an evaluation. "We had experts in the evaluation instruments, the student/resident perspective and the institution and school perspective"—the project director said. (Project Director/Bednash)

AFTERWARD

The Nurse Residency Program Outcomes Committee continues to collect and analyze data received from the residents. The committee is also exploring accreditation of the residency program through the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. The project director, Polly Bednash, PhD, RN, FAAN, presented the findings to RWJF's Nursing Team members in August 2005.

According to Bednash, the federal Health Resources and Services Administration's Division of Nursing is considering using the nurse residency evaluation plan developed under this project to evaluate its own nurse residency program.

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APPENDIX 1

Nurse Residency Program Sites and Data Collection Sites

(Current as of the end date of the program; provided by the program’s management; not verified by RWJF.)

- University Medical Center, Tucson, Ariz. *
- University of Colorado Hospital *
- University of Kentucky Hospital *
- New York University Medical Center *
- University of Pennsylvania Hospital *
- University of Utah Hospitals and Clinics *
- Oregon Health and Science University, University Hospital *
- University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center
- The University of Kansas Medical Center *
- University of North Carolina Hospitals *
- University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas *
- Stony Brook University Hospital, N.Y. *
- Grady Health System, Ga.
- Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center
- Virginia Commonwealth University Health Sciences Center
- The Methodist Hospital, Houston, Texas
- University of Missouri Health Care
- University of California, Los Angeles, Healthcare
- Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Tenn.
- Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center, N.C.
- University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics

* Data Collection Sites
APPENDIX 2

Members of the Nurse Residency Program Outcomes Committee

(Current as of the end date of the program; provided by the program’s management; not verified by RWJF.)

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APPENDIX 3

The Nurse Residency Program Control Sites

(Current as of the end date of the program; provided by the program’s management; not verified by RWJF.)

- University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina, N.C.
- Emory University Hospital, Ga.
- Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, Pa.
- University of Virginia Health System
- St. Paul Medical Center, Minn.
- Rush University Medical Center, Ill.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Reports