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Nurse Education in Practice

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/issn/14715953

Guest Editorial

The challenges of COVID-19 in nursing education: The time for faculty leadership training is *now*



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords

Nursing faculty
Leadership
Leadership training

Nursing faculty hold a critical and influential role in both the university and clinical setting. Faculty are expected to display the values established by their academic and clinical institution, function as agents of change, stay abreast the latest teaching strategies and technologies, display leadership and management abilities, and engage in advocacy strategies to promote student and organizational growth (Kiel, 2015; National League of Nursing [NLN], 2020; World Health Organization [WHO], 2016). Nursing faculty also play a pivotal role in contributing to the profession through research and evidence-based practice initiatives, shaping health policy, and participating in the measurement, assessment, and evaluation of curriculum (Broome and Marshall, 2020; WHO, 2016). In addition to these critical responsibilities, faculty are often plagued with ongoing pressures related to projecting short-term and long-term student/organizational needs, managing faculty incivility, low morale, and in some circumstances, faculty shortages (Kiel, 2015). In most cases, faculty do not have the leadership training needed to assist in mastering these everyday leadership responsibilities, which prompts the question: *can faculty really prepare students for leadership challenges in practice if they aren't fully prepared themselves?*

Take for instance the current pandemic. The novel coronavirus, formally named COVID-19 by the WHO, has wreaked havoc across all academic institutions adding even more responsibility to already pressured faculty. Academic institutions, like many other businesses, have had to convert all classes, meetings, and other face-face encounters to a virtual environment to ensure the safety of themselves and students. This task has not been easy for those unfamiliar with the complexities of virtual learning, increasing both workload and stress during an unsettling time. These additional job demands coupled with ongoing organizational change has required faculty to exercise their leadership abilities in unfamiliar areas. Such areas include providing workforce support for loss of adjunct faculty, modifying clinical site requirements for nursing students - ensuring not to breach Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) or other organization accreditation standards, and collaborating with academic leadership on ways to maintain student retention, recovery strategies for the negative financial impact, and identify moral and creative ways to continue marketing for

enrollment. To navigate these newfound responsibilities, faculty should engage in leadership development.

Leadership development for faculty has been supported by large health and nursing specific organizations such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), and the National League of Nursing (NLN) and continues to be promoted today. Faculty should take advantage of the opportunities and resources provided by these organizations- or others- and gain knowledge of the basic principles of management along with the underpinnings of leadership theory, skills, competencies, and to gain knowledge on how to lead effectively-not only for their institution but for the success of their students. This knowledge and new perspective will provide the tools needed to navigate the new complexities of the faculty role during the COVID-19 outbreak, and long after. Leadership training can assist faculty in creating and incorporating novel teaching assignments for classroom and clinical requirements while providing insight to the complexities that the students are likely to face in the currently disrupted workplace.

Moreover, it can help faculty move beyond the basic concepts and theories of leadership that are included in nursing program curriculum. It can provide insight on how to display positivity and influence in challenging times, encourage success, inspire intellectual stimulation through thought-provoking, industry associated action learning assignments, demonstrate the importance of active listening, decision-making in an indecisive environment, celebrating small wins- and sharing with all staff or support service personnel involved, and overcoming team dysfunction to achieve success. This in turn, will give students the fundamental building blocks needed to navigate the difficult and fluid situations surrounding nursing practice and leadership. Furthermore, some of the greatest lessons learned by students stem from the personal and professional leadership experiences-both negative and positive, shared by their course faculty. These shared examples provide a vision and framework that enables students to meet and conquer the continuous challenges in healthcare, education, and society as they progress through a COVID-19 and post COVID-19 world.

However, faculty are often hesitant to engage in additional training.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2020.102831>

Received 30 April 2020; Received in revised form 16 June 2020; Accepted 26 June 2020

Available online 5 July 2020

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With academic institutions relying heavily on teaching, service, and scholarship for promotion and tenure evaluation, there is oftentimes little room for additional training. However, with the continual presence of rapidly evolving technologies, changing healthcare environments, and pressure to ensure students are fully equipped to meet the dynamic needs of their patients and healthcare organizations, faculty must overcome the hesitancy. They must recognize that much like their students, their own leadership knowledge and skills need to be continuously evolving to be successful educators. In order to promote excellence in education and prepare students for the presently complex nature of healthcare, faculty should engage in professional development opportunities to promote leadership skills, and there should be no terminal point in a faculty's development of leadership knowledge, skill, and competency.

Now, more than ever, the need for faculty to function as leaders within the educational arena is of utmost importance. These skills will drive the educational experiences of students and lay a solid foundation for future leaders in nursing. Based on the idea that the development of leadership skills occurs on a continuum, faculty should consistently engage in professional development opportunities and practice skill building. However, due to the current stressors and increased demands on the educational institutions, providing professional development opportunities may not take precedence, or happen at all. As a result, the responsibility to seek out and engage in leadership skill development will become the responsibility of the individual faculty members. While this may seem like a daunting task, on top of an already challenging situation, the time must be set aside to engage in leadership development. At the end of the day, if faculty aren't fully prepared for the leadership challenges within their own institutions and classrooms, how can they adequately prepare students for their leadership challenges?

Funding

There was no funding provided.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2020.102831>.

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