

EDUCATION

Fostering mentorship through professional development

by Cherie Severson

Mentorship is a mutually beneficial, long-term professional relationship in which an experienced leader supports the maturation of a less experienced practitioner for the long-term purpose of developing expertise, knowledge, and professional development (Canadian Nurses Association [CNA], 2004; DeCicco, 2008; Grossman, 2007; Morarescu, 2009). The concept of mentorship is considered a core concept for leadership and advanced practice nursing (Hamric, Spross, & Hanson, 2009). Regardless of one's nursing role in administration, management, advanced practice or bedside nursing, all nurses are leaders (CNA, 2014). Each of these roles encompasses a delineated scope of practice along with the ability to make specific decisions (CNA, 2014; Hamric et al., 2009). The nurse in her specific role has the opportunity and, in essence, the professional obligation to mentor any nurse who is less knowledgeable or less skilled regardless of the years of experience attained (Alberta Nursing Education Administrators [ANEA], 2006; CNA, 2014). The concept of mentorship is significant to ensuring patients and families benefit from the provision of safe, ethical care from a skilled workforce (CNA, 2004; DeCicco, 2008; Fox, 2010; Grossman, 2007; Morarescu, 2009). Other benefits to mentorship include increasing nurse career satisfaction, decreased recruitment, and increased retention

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of nurses (CNA, 2004; DeCicco, 2008; Fox, 2010; Grossman, 2007; Morarescu, 2009).

To strengthen a nurse's ability to mentor other colleagues, it is imperative that they extend their knowledge and skill base beyond what is learned from attendance at their worksite on a daily basis. In fact, professional development is an expectation that is deemed by provincial regulatory bodies in Canadian provinces and is encouraged by specialty certification boards in North America to meet national standards of excellence in a specialty area (College and Association of Registered Nurses in Alberta [CARNA], 2013; CNA, 2014; Oncology Nurses Certification Corporation [ONCC], 2014). In order to maintain their expertise and continual development, it is a requirement that nurses participate in continuing education specific to their role and position, endeavour to learn from experiences or opportunities that promote nursing practice and professional growth, and undergo a regular performance appraisal process to ensure they maintain their own professional development (ANEA, 2006; CARNA, 2013). By doing so this not only ensures they meet the standards of continuing nursing education and provincial regulations, it also ensures that nurses enhance their ability to mentor other colleagues in their area of expertise (ANEA, 2006; CARNA, 2013).

Professional development is not always at the forefront of every nurse's 'to-do list' for a number of reasons. Beyond their regular work day, nurses have many obligations with which to contend. Raising children, family obligations, committee work, and community involvement are among a few to mention.

There are other issues that impede a nurse's ability to partake in professional development opportunities. Taking time off from work to attend

an educational event or a conference is a constant challenge at most worksites due to a lack of staff. Finances can be a deciding factor if there is no funding to pay for registration fees, meals, airline tickets, and hotel accommodations. Employer expectations for nurses to present about the conference they attended are a deterrent for some nurses who fear public speaking or simply do not have the time to put a presentation together. The incentives to mentorship and professional development are considered intrinsic and this does not necessarily encourage involvement from the majority of nurses (CNA, 2004). Simply put, there are few monetary rewards for nurses when it comes to 'leaning in' to professional development opportunities (Sandberg, 2013).

However, there are a number of different ways nurses can participate in professional development opportunities that are less intimidating, less time-consuming, and less costly whilst still providing opportunities to connect with other professionals in their area of expertise. Some of these include:

1. Joining a professional membership organization where free online webinars are available year round. The cost of the membership would be nominal compared with a non-funded conference registration fee plus hotel and flights. Webinars can be offered during the day, so if you are a part-time mom/dad you may be able to attend when your children are at school. A subscription to a journal may be included in your membership depending on the organization you join.
2. Subscribe to a professional journal of interest. The hours of reading can generally be tallied and submitted as continuing nursing education (CNE) hours towards your provincial regulatory body's requirement for provincial licensure or certification requirements.

3. Join a Special Interest Group (SIG) related to your area of specialty. Certain SIGs have online case studies and articles of interest that are free! These make for good professional networking opportunities and discussion. Certain SIGs send out notices for upcoming events related to the specialty such as conferences and evening events. Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology (CANO) has a number of SIGs that nurses can join if you are a member.
4. Get certified in your specialty! Check out the Canadian Nurses Association or Oncology Nurses Society (ONS) websites for certification opportunities. There is generally some monetary reward for achieving a credential and the hours you study can, in most cases, be submitted to your provincial regulatory body or certification organization as continuing nursing education hours.
5. Take an online course. Some of these courses can offer as much as 15 to 25 hours of continuing education. However, they generally have a cost, so be watchful of course fees and textbook fees. Taking an online course may make it easier to obtain continuing education hours rather

than trying to get time off work to attend a three-day conference that provides similar continuing education hours. However, this may not be feasible if you have young children at home.

6. Write an article. If you have the interest and ability to search out and explore a topic and write well, there may be the opportunity to obtain hours for continuing nursing education by submitting an article to a journal of your specialty. A certain portion of the hours can be used for continuing education hours.
7. Join a journal club. If you like to read and discuss articles, this is a good way to network, get out of the house for the evening, and still obtain continuing nursing education hours. They can usually be found through workplace settings or online memberships in your specialty.
8. Attend a local, national or international conference related to your specialty. Keep in mind these may bare a cost related to registration, flights, accommodations, and meals. Some of this expense your employer may reimburse you for, or you may attain funding through a provincial nursing organization. Conferences

can be tremendous opportunities to network with other colleagues in your specialty at differing levels, learn some of the most cutting edge research, and visit some of the most incredible venues.

Professional development is imperative to mentoring other colleagues. It is through professional development that nurse leaders can mentor other nurses to help to build a stronger workforce in their specialty (CNA, 2004; DeCicco, 2008; Fox, 2010; Grossman, 2007; Morarescu, 2009). The greatest benefit is that patients and families attain the highest quality care from knowledgeable and skilled professional nurses (CNA, 2004; DeCicco, 2008; Fox, 2010; Grossman, 2007; Morarescu, 2009). There really are a vast number of ways for nurses to promote continuing professional development. They do not all take considerable amounts of time and money. As leaders and life-long teachers in nursing at any level, it is an expectation that professional development and mentorship be a part of a nurse's career for her/his own development, as well as of those she/he mentors along the way (ANEA, 2006; CARNA, 2013).

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