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Using Role-modeling and Professional Socialization to Develop Future Leaders in Nursing Education

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A nursing shortage is present in the United States and is expected to get worse (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2007). A major contributing factor to the nursing shortage is the concurrent scarcity of nursing faculty. In 2006, over 40,000 qualified applicants to nursing schools were unable to be accepted due in part to the insufficient number of nurse faculty (AACN). The shortage of nursing faculty is related to numerous factors: one being the average age of current nurse educators in academia. According to Kaufman (2007) "48 percent of nurse educators are 55 and older" (p. 65). In addition, approximately, one-half of current nursing faculty report plans to retire within the next decade (Kaufman). Therefore, it is imperative that successive planning be implemented to recruit the next generation of nurse educators.

However, there are barriers to succession planning in nursing education. Faculty in baccalaureate nursing programs recognize that nursing students often do not consider the nurse educator role as a career path and expert educators point out that attracting students to nursing education concentrations in master's programs is difficult. The lack of interest and desire to pursue the educator role stems from many issues including salary, workload, and misunderstanding of multiple faculty roles (Kaufman, 2007). Therefore, current nursing faculty members have the opportunity and responsibility to promote nursing education as a viable and rewarding career option for students.

The School of Nursing at Western Kentucky University (WKU) has experienced the shortage of educators first hand. In order to meet the needs of

constituents for more nurses, the number of students admitted has increased dramatically, while positions vacated by retiring faculty are difficult to fill at times. Additionally, novice faculty may leave nursing education due to being unfamiliar with the multiple roles faculty are required to fulfill. To increase the potential applicant pool for nursing education positions, awareness of the role and expectations of the nurse educator must begin in undergraduate education. Boyer (1990) noted the faculty role included much more than the scholarship of teaching. This remains evident in tenure and promotion guidelines in most college/university settings. The requirements include research and publication, teaching, service, and maintaining current knowledge in area of practice (Boyer).

The nursing faculty at WKU recognize the value of role-modeling as a technique to encourage students to consider nursing education as an area of advanced practice. As students progress through a nursing program, they begin the process of professional socialization through their many educational experiences, which allows for observation of faculty in multiple roles. In the BSN prelicensure program at WKU, professional socialization occurs not only formally during traditional classroom and clinical activities, but also informally.

Informal socialization occurs through participation in a variety of activities. These include maintaining active membership in the pre professional organization (e.g., Kentucky Association of Nursing Students), participating with faculty in community service events, attending continuing education offerings focusing on current issues, assisting faculty with research, and in teaching others in the community about health related issues. These activities offer students opportunities to observe faculty in the roles of service, teaching, practice, and research. Role-modeling the importance of each faculty role helps students to see that faculty members have diverse responsibilities, of which classroom teaching is just one. These formal and informal interactions with faculty allow students to see

the diversity and complexity of faculty life. Hopefully, by observing faculty members in these roles, students will think about pursuing nursing education as an exciting professional career choice. As stewards of the practice of nursing, we must assume the responsibility of not only teaching the next generation of nurses, but helping plan for the next generation of nurse educators. Promoting the advanced practice of nursing education safeguards the future of our profession.

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