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# Evaluation of the effectiveness of and obstacles to a recruitment program for SPOONS

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**Evaluation of the effectiveness of and obstacles to a recruitment program for SPOONS**

**A thesis presented**

**by**

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**An Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of**

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## Abstract

The purpose of the proposed project was to develop a Pre-professional Recruitment Plan (PRP) for the Support for and Promotion of Optimal Nutritional Status (SPOONS) at Washington Regional Medical Center (WRMC). Additionally, this project determined if the PRP led to a significant increase in the number of volunteer participants in WRMC's SPOONS program. Finally, this research examined the attrition rate of participants related to the mandatory Tuberculosis (TB) skin test and drug screen, and extensive SPOONS training program required to volunteer at WRMC.

Malnutrition is a serious medical concern among hospitalized older adults. Socialization can improve the nutritional intake of older adults and there is a need for volunteer services to provide that socialization. WRMC was in need of a larger population of University of Arkansas students to draw volunteers from for the SPOONS program, and a sustainable mechanism to do so. The Volunteer Action Center (VAC) at the University of Arkansas was recruited to partner with WRMC to recruit volunteers for the SPOONS program. Data was collected prior to the implementation of the PRP in August, 2013 to determine the initial number of SPOONS volunteers and again in December, 2013 to determine the number of volunteers after the implementation of the PRP.

A convenience sample was used for this study. Demographic data was collected upon participants' arrival at the SPOONS orientation meetings via a demographic survey. Respondents who identified themselves as having been recruited through the PRP were included in the data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to determine if there was an increase between the number of participants before and after the implementation of the PRP. Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the percentage of new volunteers recruited through the PRP.

The percentage of PRP potential volunteers who completed the TB test and drug screening was to be calculated as well. The results of this research project contributed to the nutritional well being of hospitalized older adults at WRMC, as well as provided opportunities for University of Arkansas pre-professional students to gain clinical experience. The research results also identified if there was an issue of attrition of volunteers through WRMC's screening process.

Results of this study indicated that the number of SPOONS volunteers at WRMC did increase after the implementation of the PRP. Results also identified that there was an issue of volunteer attrition between the SPOONS training session and the completion of WRMC's volunteer requirements. The findings and limitations of this study are discussed, in addition to recommendations for future research.

## **Evaluation of the effectiveness of and obstacles to a recruitment program for SPOONS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the proposed project is to develop a Pre-professional Recruitment Plan (PRP) for the Support for and Promotion of Optimal Nutritional Status (SPOONS) program at Washington Regional Medical Center (WRMC). SPOONS is a volunteer feeding assistance program that aims to improve the well being of hospitalized older adults at WRMC.

Additionally, this project will determine if the PRP leads to significant increases in the number of volunteer participants in WRMC's SPOONS program. Finally, this research will examine the attrition rate of participants related to the mandatory Tuberculosis (TB) skin test and drug screen and extensive SPOONS training program required to volunteer at WRMC.

A large proportion of hospital patient populations are comprised of older adults. According to Storey & Thomas (2004), "by the year 2030, the percentage of persons older than 65 years in the United States will have doubled from 11% to 22%, ultimately representing approximately 55 million individuals" (p. 4). As the average age in America rises daily, this population's health care needs are important. A serious medical concern among hospitalized older adults is malnutrition, with 39% to 47% malnourished or at risk for malnutrition (Kaiser et al., 2010). According to Adams et al. (2008), malnutrition in the elderly "is directly related to increasing hospital length of stay, treatment costs, infection and complication rates and mortality" (p. 144). In order to decrease these rising statistics, malnutrition in the elderly needs to be addressed. Lack of socialization is one of the main contributing factors to appetite disturbance in the elderly population and is an issue that WRMC is addressing with the SPOONS program ("Consider the Cause," 2010).

An adequate intake of nutrients is important for maintenance of physical and emotional health and healing in older adults (Amella & Aselage, 2012). Chronic under-nutrition leads to physiological issues including fatigue, weakness, cachexia, and micronutrient deficiencies (Storey & Thomas, 2004). Mealtime presents an opportunity for hospitalized older adults to socialize, obtain required nutrients, and maintain or improve physical and emotional health. Appetite disturbances in the elderly can have many different etiologies including social (e.g., lack of socialization, dependency in eating) and psychological (e.g., depression, dementia) issues (“Consider the Cause,” 2010). Nutritional interventions that address these factors may alleviate the need for pharmacological intervention, decreasing the financial burden of medication on the older adult (“Consider the Cause,” 2010).

Improving the social context of meal times has been associated with increased dietary intake for hospitalized older adults (“Consider the Cause,” 2010). Since socialization can improve the nutritional intake of older adults and healthcare professionals don’t always have time to provide that amount of attention to every patient, there is a need for volunteers to fill that role.

### **SPOONS Volunteer Program**

WRMC has adopted a volunteer feeding assistance program for hospitalized older adults, called SPOONS, on their Senior Specialty Unit (SSU). The SPOONS program at WRMC was replicated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham Hospital’s program design, which was implemented in 2008 (K. Flood, personal communication, March 27, 2013). As defined by WRMC, the goal of the SPOONS program is to provide assistance with meals to hospitalized older adults with no known swallowing difficulties (A. Tackett, personal communication, February 13, 2013).

SPOONS volunteers will assist patients in the SSU with mealtime feeding for one uninterrupted hour on one day a week, excluding weekends. Volunteers are currently being recruited from the University of Arkansas' pre-nursing and nursing student population. There has been one volunteer orientation class held at the University of Arkansas Eleanor Mann School of Nursing (EMSON) led by Amy Tackett. The orientation consisted of a 20 minute introduction, a 30 minute swallowing video, a 20 minute education section from a speech pathologist, 1 hour of practice and questions, and an orientation competency evaluation. Volunteers must also be cleared through WRMC's Volunteer Program and complete the volunteer requirements before participating in the program.

### **Recruitment Plan**

WRMC is in need of a larger population of University of Arkansas students to draw volunteers from, and a sustainable mechanism to do so. SPOONS is a new program in the Northwest Arkansas (NWA) area. University of Arkansas students are not well acquainted with the program and awareness about this unique volunteer opportunity is low among pre-professional students. There may also be an issue of attrition through WRMC's volunteer process. WRMC volunteer requirements include: being at least 18 years old; completing Human Resource Department's HIPPA education; attending a SPOONS training session; passing the competency validation for the SPOONS program, a TB skin test, and a urine drug screen (A. Tackett, personal communication, March 17, 2013). The TB skin test and urinalysis are performed by WRMC at no cost to project volunteers. However, the volunteers must make two separate trips to WRMC for the invasive testing and reading of the TB skin test results. The purpose of this project is to increase the number of volunteer participants in the SPOONS

program and examine if there is an issue of attrition from participation in orientation to completing the required invasive screenings.

### **Volunteerism**

The motivation to volunteer is important in understanding participation in volunteer services, such as the SPOONS program (Dávila & Díaz-Morales, 2009). Volunteerism can be defined as voluntary, sustained, and ongoing helpfulness (Clary et al., 1998). Among college-aged volunteers, external motivation to volunteer is derived from rewards from an external source (Beehr et al., 2010). These external rewards can be tangible (e.g., resume enhancement) or intangible (e.g., praise) (Beehr et al., 2010). Internal motivation refers to rewards coming from the students themselves and not from others (Beehr et al., 2010). Students often undertake volunteer services with the unselfish motive of volunteering their time for a worthy cause (Beehr et al., 2010). Pre-professional students are externally motivated to volunteer for programs that will enhance their resumes and make them more competitive applicants to professional programs. Pre-professional students are internally motivated to volunteer for medical programs specifically because they allow them to experience what their future profession may be like. Opportunities to volunteer for medical programs, like SPOONS, are rare and are valued by pre-professional students.

### **Recruitment Development**

The Volunteer Action Center (VAC) at the University of Arkansas will be recruited to partner with WRMC to recruit volunteers for the SPOONS program. The VAC is a student led volunteer coordination board that serves University of Arkansas students by advertising local volunteer opportunities (A. Oxford, personal communication, February 26, 2013). The SPOONS project will be posted on the VAC website as a volunteer opportunity available under WRMC.



Social media (e.g., Arkansas Newswire, Twitter, and Facebook) will be used to raise awareness about opportunities to volunteer with the SPOONS program. Although it is expected that the VAC will successfully help increase the number of volunteers, it is also expected that the required testing will be an obstacle to retaining volunteers.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the proposed project was to answer the following two research questions:

1. Was there a significant increase in the number of volunteers in the SPOONS program at WRMC after the implementation of the PRP?
2. What percentage of potential volunteers who were recruited through the PRP and attended WRMC's SPOONS orientation completed the requisite TB test and urinalysis for drug screening?

It was hypothesized that the use of the VAC would significantly increase the number of SPOONS volunteers at WRMC. Further, it was hypothesized that the percentage of volunteers who complete the screening tests would reflect significant attrition from the number of volunteers who attended the SPOONS orientation.

### **Proposed Methodology**

The initial study proposal included the use of a statistical test; however, facility-based issues resulted in early termination of volunteer recruitment. Thus, the sample size was too small for the effective use of a statistical test of significance and the methodology was altered to address this change. Both the proposed and altered methodologies are described. Only the first research question required revision. The revised question is as follows: Was there an increase in the number of volunteers in the SPOONS program at WRMC after the implementation of the PRP? It was hypothesized that the PRP would result in an increase in the number of volunteers

in the SPOONS program at WRMC.

### **Participants**

A convenience sample was used for this study. Participants were those who self-selected to participate in SPOONS and who attended the SPOONS orientation meeting. Potential volunteers were asked to respond to a demographic survey upon arrival at orientation.

Demographic data regarding undergraduate degree program, age, gender, and ethnicity were collected in order to describe the student sample. The survey also had students identify how they were recruited to volunteer for the SPOONS program. Respondents who identified themselves as having been recruited through the PRP were included in the data analysis. Students recruited by the VAC were able to log volunteer hours through the VAC website to be approved by the administrator for the SPOONS program, confirming their attendance at scheduled volunteer time.

Thirty-seven participants attended the first training session. Of these participants, 24 identified themselves as having been recruited through the PRP. Of these 24 participants, eight were recruited via a University of Arkansas email or Facebook announcement, 12 were recruited from an EMSON announcement, one was recruited from the VAC website posting, and three were recruited from an advisor email. Twelve of these participants were age 18-20, 12 were age 20-30, and zero were over the age of 30. There were two males and 22 females. There was one Asian participant and 22 White participants. Thirteen participants were pre-nursing or nursing students, two were pre-medical students, and nine were pre-communication disorders or communication disorders students. At the second training session, recruitment was limited to nursing students per facility's request and there were five volunteer participants, one of which

was self-identified as having been recruited through the PRP. This participant was self-identified as a white, 18-20 year old, female nursing student.

Three out of eight of the participants recruited via University of Arkansas email or Facebook announcement completed the volunteer requirements and volunteered. Six out of 10 of the participants recruited via the EMSON announcement volunteered. Zero participants recruited via the VAC website posting volunteered. Three out of six of the participants recruited via an advisor email volunteered. Three of the volunteers were age 18-20, eight were age 20-30, and zero volunteers were over the age of 30. One out of two males volunteered and ten out of 22 females volunteered. One out of one Asian student volunteered and ten out of 23 White students volunteered. Six out of 13 pre-nursing/nursing participants, one out of two pre-medical participants, and four out of nine pre-speech pathology/speech pathology students volunteered.

## **Procedures**

To address these questions, an extensive literature search was completed, focusing on the academic and nursing literature available on the topic of volunteerism. The information gathered from that literature review was used to develop the PRP for recruitment of pre-professional students from the University of Arkansas to participate in the SPOONS program.

The information gleaned from the previously mentioned literature review was used to design the initial approach of the PRP. This intervention was first attempted by establishing reliable contacts with University of Arkansas employees who had access to pre-professional student list-serves. Several pre-professional advisors, secretaries, the VAC, and pre-professional program supervisors were contacted for support. A recruitment flyer was developed according to the literature review results and focused on providing information specific to college-aged volunteers (e.g., resume enhancement opportunity, hospital experience, impacts the health of

older adult patients). The recruitment flyer was posted on the VAC website and emailed to the University of Arkansas's pre-nursing, nursing, pre-speech pathology, and speech pathology students. Social media was utilized as a recruitment intervention; the volunteer opportunity was posted on the EMSON and the EMSON Class 2014 Facebook page as a strategy for volunteer recruitment.

The second intervention for the PRP was then planned and included establishing a sustainable recruitment mechanism with the first PRP intervention that resulted in the greatest number of volunteers at the SPOONS training session. However, the second intervention was unable to be completed due to unforeseeable project limitations. There was a change in leadership over the SPOONS program during the project's implementation period. During this time, the SPOONS program coordinator who previously agreed to support this project transitioned to a new position and a different employee began to oversee the SPOONS program, including this project. WRMC's new SPOONS program coordinator was overwhelmed by the population of volunteers recruited through the first intervention of this project, and was unable to manage the increase in numbers appropriately. Therefore, WRMC requested that recruitment efforts be reduced and the number of volunteers recruited was limited to within the nursing school population. Thus, the research questions and interventions had to be altered to meet the needs of the facility. Subsequently, the methodology of this project was changed to a descriptive analysis of the project's results, using frequencies and descriptive statistics to monitor trends and changes in number of volunteer participants.

To answer the first research question, a demographic survey was administered at the SPOONS orientation meeting, allowing participants to identify themselves as having been recruited by the PRP. This survey also allowed for the collection of demographic data for the

study's population. At the initial training session, the first intervention was used for volunteer recruitment.

The second research question was answered by determining if participants who attended SPOONS orientation and were identified as having been recruited by the PRP actually volunteered with the SPOONS program. Data was collected from WRMC's SPOONS volunteer sign-in sheet located in the SSU. The project assumes that participants who volunteered with SPOONS completed WRMC's volunteer requirements prior to volunteering. Therefore, it can be said that those who volunteered completed the requisite TB test and urinalysis for drug screening and those participants were included in the data analysis to answer the second research question.

The study was completed after the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board and the study facility approved the study procedures. The data collection period began in August of 2013 and ended in May of 2014. Data was collected prior to the implementation of the PRP in August of 2013 to determine the initial number of SPOONS volunteers and again in December of 2013 to determine the number of volunteers after the implementation of the PRP.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to answer the first research question, it was initially proposed that a dependent t-test would be used to determine if there was a significant increase between the number of participants before and after the implementation of the PRP. However, facility-based issues resulted in the early termination of the project and a large decrease in the expected number of participants. Thus, methodology was altered to address this change. To answer the revised question, the number of participants who volunteered prior to the new recruitment strategy was compared to the number of participants after the new recruitment strategy was implemented.

In order to address the first research question, descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the percentage of new volunteers recruited through the PRP. To answer the second research question, the percentage of PRP potential volunteers who completed the TB test and drug screening was calculated.

### **Results**

Upon completion of data collection, materials were combined from both training sessions for comprehensive analysis. For the first research question, results indicated that the number of SPOONS volunteers did increase after the implementation of the PRP. The facility had six active SPOONS program volunteers prior to the implementation of the PRP. Following the implementation of the PRP, the total sample recruited via the PRP included 25 SPOONS orientation participants from the University of Arkansas (n=25).

The second research question was what percentage of potential volunteers who were recruited through the PRP and attended WRMC's SPOONS orientation completed the requisite TB test and urinalysis for drug screening. Twelve out of the 25 orientation participants later volunteered at WRMC with the SPOONS program; thus, 48% of orientation participants actually completed training, testing, and actively volunteered. Of those who volunteered, seven participants volunteered once, one participant volunteered twice, two participants volunteered three times, and one participant volunteered five times.

### **Discussion**

It was hypothesized that there would be an increase in the number of volunteer participants in WRMC's SPOONS program following implementation of the PRP. This was accurate, as the number of participants who attended orientation increased from six to 25.

Although the changes made to the study's methodology and structure did not allow for a statistical test for significance of the PRP to be determined, one can infer that the PRP was successful in increasing the number of volunteer participants for the SPOONS program due to the recruitment success that led to WRMC's decision to alter this project's goal. The number of volunteers recruited for the first SPOONS training session was greater than WRMC had envisioned and was willing to manage. WRMC decided to limit the number of volunteers recruited, in order to better meet the needs of the facility.

It was also hypothesized that the percentage of volunteers who completed the screening tests would reflect attrition from the number of volunteers who attended the SPOONS orientation. This hypothesis was supported, as 48% of volunteers who attended the SPOONS orientation completed WRMC's required volunteer screening tests and volunteered with the SPOONS program. This attrition may have been the result of a lack of compliance with the required invasive screenings, a loss of interest during the time required to complete the volunteer process, scheduling conflicts between the participant and the human resources department, loss of motivation to volunteer, or confusion about the volunteer requirements. Another contributing issue could have been the lack of organization of the SPOONS program. Volunteers were not required to come on specific days, for specific meals, or for a specific period of time. This may have contributed to the lack of motivation for participants to volunteer multiple times, as there were no clear expectations of their participation in the program.

Future research may focus on resolving the issue of attrition by simplifying the volunteer process at WRMC. This could involve providing the initial volunteer screening tests at the SPOONS orientation session, in order to reduce the number of times the participant has to return to the facility to complete the volunteer requirements. Another strategy may be to require

participants to have the volunteer requirements completed within a certain time period following orientation, using that deadline as motivation for accomplishing those tasks in a timely manner. The SPOONS program coordinator could also send participants reminder emails to complete their volunteer requirements throughout the process. It may also be beneficial to require participants to volunteer within a certain time period following completion of their volunteer requirements as motivation for participants to continue the process and actually volunteer with the SPOONS program. Future researchers may want to explore if these approaches reduce volunteer attrition in the SPOONS program.

Additionally, it was hypothesized that the use of the VAC would increase the number of SPOONS volunteers at WRMC. The results showed that the VAC was not the most successful recruitment strategy for securing pre-professional volunteers. The most successful recruitment strategy was an announcement from EMSON. Sixty percent of participants recruited from EMSON completed the volunteer prerequisites and volunteered with the SPOONS program. Future researchers may consider exploring the impact of utilizing the leadership of pre-professional undergraduate programs as a source of recruiting students via email and other available media sources, and not restrict recruitment efforts to the use of the VAC.

### **Limitations**

A primary limitation for this project was the change in leadership over the SPOONS program that occurred during the project's implementation period. This change in leadership limited recruitment efforts and drastically decreased the number of volunteers recruited for the SPOONS program. This limitation changed the study's research first research question, interventions, and results. In addition, the study was limited by a relatively homogenous sample,



primarily Caucasian females. The study was also limited by the use of only one hospital and one university. Thus, the findings may not be generalized beyond this sample. Future researchers should seek to enlist multiple hospitals and universities to evaluate the effectiveness of these recruitment techniques across various settings.

### **Future Research**

Researchers could develop a number of studies to address the limitations of the current study. Future researchers may want to consider studying the recruitment of a more diverse population of volunteers to achieve more generalizable results. Future research may also consider implementing the study's recruitment strategies at various facilities and universities.

The primary limitation encountered in this study could be avoided in the future by having WRMC's leadership for the SPOONS program determine the number of volunteers needed for the program and the number of volunteers they can successfully manage at one time prior to recruitment efforts. Once the needed volunteer number is determined, this should be communicated to the individual in charge of recruitment, so that an appropriate strategy for volunteer recruitment can be determined. Future research may focus on meeting the specific recruitment goals of the facility and the development of a recruitment plan that allows for limitation of the volunteer population.

Future research could also focus on studying the external motivation of pre-professional college students as a strategy for recruitment. Research shows that among college-aged volunteers, external motivation to volunteer is derived from rewards from an external source that may be tangible (e.g., resume enhancement) or intangible (e.g., praise) (Beehr et al., 2010). A recruitment strategy for the future may include administering a volunteer application to a sub-set

of pre-professional students (e.g., pre-medical freshmen students) and selecting the pre-determined number of needed volunteers from the pool of completed applications. Future recruitment could emphasize external motivation by making the selection process to volunteer more competitive, making being selected to volunteer seem more like a reward to participants rather than an extra task to complete. By increasing the perceived external rewards associated with volunteering, the program may have more success in retaining volunteers through the extensive volunteer requirements.

Another suggestion for future studies would be to focus on younger groups of students who are looking for programs to be involved with long-term during college. This might be a recruitment strategy that helps WRMC to retain volunteers. The program may also benefit from having volunteers schedule the days and times that they will be coming to volunteer to make it easier for volunteers to plan ahead when they will be spending time volunteering. Also, a system could be developed to keep volunteers accountable for their time commitment of one hour on one day of the week. It may also be beneficial to have volunteers commit to a specific time period (e.g., 8 weeks) that they are expected to participate as SPOONS volunteers.

The SPOONS program may also consider having a staff member or volunteer who is dedicated to supporting the SPOONS program as their sole responsibility in the SSU. The current program director is a full-time employee at WRMC whose hired position is not as the director of the SPOONS program. If someone is focused solely on the growth and success of the SPOONS program, the program's volunteer participation may be more successful. This person could be responsible for sending email reminders to participants, scheduling volunteer times, and selecting volunteers to participate in the program. This strategy could also be considered as a part of future study designs.

## **Conclusion**

Strategic volunteer recruitment plans are essential to the success of hospital volunteer programs. The utilization of internal and external motivators, simplification of the volunteer process, and a clear focus on the goals and needs of the specific volunteer program may be useful strategies to help recruit and retain pre-professional volunteers.

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