

Student Nurse — Ambulatory Care Practicum Collaboration: Interim Results

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Abstract

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015) data suggests there is an increased need for health care professionals in primary care when compared with other health care fields. Specifically, the American Association of Ambulatory Care Nurses (AAACN) promotes addressing the increasing need for registered nurses (RN) with specialized knowledge and skills to be effective in the ambulatory care environment (2014). Additionally, researchers (AACN, 2014) predict there will be a serious nursing shortage by 2025. With changes in the population health arena, specifically the shift to outpatient care, ambulatory care nursing leadership will need to develop strategies to train novice nurses to deliver care to patients with complex, multi-systems medical and mental health comorbidities in this unique environment. Currently, newly graduated RNs are not hired into the ambulatory care area in most settings.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing-American Organization of Nurse Executives (2012), now American Organization for Nursing Leadership, encourages academic-practice partnerships that enhance the development of “an evidence-based transition program for students and new graduates” and to develop “organizational processes and structures that support and recognize academic and educational achievement.”

The University of Maryland, School of Nursing places over 200 senior, pre-licensure students (Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Clinical Nurse Leader) each semester in acute care clinical settings, where staff nurse preceptors facilitate student clinical learning activities under the supervision of clinical faculty. There is an ongoing need to identify and develop novel placements to meet program demands.

This project’s two main goals were 1) to develop a partnership between the University of Maryland, School of Nursing and the University of Maryland Medical Center to bridge the gap between entry-level nursing education and practice in an ambulatory care environment, thereby increasing the number of clinical placement sites available to the nursing program, and 2) to expose future RNs to the unique roles and responsibilities of ambulatory care nursing, resulting in increased readiness to function in this setting as an entry-level nurse.

This presentation seeks to describe the goals, design, and process improvements made during the 18-month pilot study. Various steps were taken to ensure the success of this project: 1) a Transition to Practice Program for Ambulatory Care Centers at the University of Maryland Medical Center was developed, 2) experts were consulted prior to determining the program

design with the best fit for the two organizations, and 3) the project was aligned with recommendations by the AACN (2014).

During three semesters (fall 2018–fall 2019), small numbers of students (n=3-4/semester) were placed in paired sets of clinical placements, one inpatient, acute care unit and one outpatient center. The blended approach provided opportunity to enrich student's practicum experience with clinical exposure in both outpatient and inpatient acute care settings. The project's original design included end-of-semester evaluations completed by students and preceptors. The evaluations informed real-time decision making by project leadership, which resulted in small program design revisions each semester. This project resulted in a clearer understanding of the utility of ambulatory care environments to meet the needs of nursing programs as well as nurse preceptors.