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### **Moving Forward During a Pandemic: Virtual Recruitment Strategies Within an Academic–Practice Partnership**

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#### **Abstract**

##### *Background/Significance*

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and President Donald Trump declared a national emergency with hospital systems initiating temporary visitor/vendor restrictions. This necessity also resulted in curtailing onsite academic information and recruitment sessions for nurses interested in pursuing advanced degrees to become clinical faculty and preceptors. In order to continue achieving the goals of our Nurse Support Program II Academic-Hospital Partnership grant, the University of Maryland School of Nursing (UMSON), in partnership with 18 Maryland hospitals, established a process of virtual recruitment sessions and support as an alternative for meeting the needs of nurses.

##### *Approach/Methods*

Pilot studies were designed with the main goal of assessing the feasibility of successfully recruiting staff nurses to pursue their education using a virtual recruitment model. The virtual recruitment model consisted of UMSON doctoral-prepared faculty, academic program specialists, and communication and admission team members working with practice partners to provide information sessions and recruit nurses into RN-to-BSN, RN-to-MSN, and BSN-to-MSN specialties. This model is based on the collaboration and interconnectedness of the academic and practice settings. March through September 2020 was the planning phase investigating new recruitment strategies. Virtual recruitment sessions were identified, offered via WebEx, and promoted on the UMSON Academic-Hospital Partnership webpage, Facebook profile, and LinkedIn page. Flyers were created and emailed to practice partners with session links. Three strategies were piloted over the next year. Pilot A was conducted from September to November 2020, inviting two to nine practice partners in small groups from Tuesday to Thursday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Pilot B was conducted during December 2020, inviting 18 practice partners from Tuesday to Thursday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Pilot C was conducted from January to March 2021, inviting 18 practice partners from Monday to Friday between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. Pilot D began in March 2021 and will last into May, inviting 18 practice partners from Tuesday to Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. to validate findings. A brief survey was emailed to nurse attendees.

### *Results*

From July to December 2019, 90 onsite recruitment sessions were held; from January to August 2020, 56 onsite recruitment sessions; and from September to December 2020, 34 virtual recruitment sessions. Recruitment occurred for three academic semesters (spring 2020, fall 2020, and spring 2021). The 90 onsite sessions admitted 24 students; 56 onsite sessions admitted 21 students; and, 34 virtual sessions admitted 17 students. The overall onsite session admission (45/146) rate was 30%. The virtual session admission (17/34) rate was 50%. The virtual admission percentage difference is significant.

### *Conclusion*

Pilot studies were essential in demonstrating the feasibility of a virtual recruitment model. Implementation of various practice partner groupings, days of the week, and timeframe offerings determined inviting 18 practice partners to each session, on Tuesday to Thursday, and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. as an efficient and effective virtual recruitment approach with attendee feedback in agreement.