Supporting Professional Advancement in Nursing (SPAN) Program Mentorship Model:
Leveraging Mentorship to Contribute to Nurse Retention and Career

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Background: In a rapidly changing health care environment, and with a forecasted shortage of RNs by 2025 (HRSA, 2014), Maryland's hospitals and health systems have a critical need to retain well-prepared new graduate nurses and to ensure adequate numbers of qualified nurses with advanced nursing degrees in its workforce. Innovative programs are needed to facilitate the seamless transition from pre-licensure nursing student to new graduate nurse and ultimately, a return to graduate studies so that nurses can achieve higher levels of education and training (IOM, 2010, p. 4) while simultaneously keeping these nurses actively employed. In 2015, the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing (JHSON), in partnership with four Baltimore hospitals received funding from Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to implement and evaluate an innovative three phase program, Supporting Professional Advancement in Nursing (SPAN), with the goal of enhancing new nurse retention while advancing the education of nurses to meet the future needs of Maryland's nursing workforce.

Methods: Mentorship was identified as a critical component of the SPAN Program model to support academic and career achievement. Nursing faculty from JHSON provide career advisement and academic mentoring to SPAN participants starting in their final semester of nursing school and continuing beyond graduation. Concurrently, expert clinical hospital-based nurses employed in the same institution have been identified and provide professional mentoring and workplace support. The SPAN Program provides semiannual training for the workplace nurse mentors.

Findings: At the conclusion of year one, 8 new graduate nurses were hired and are currently working in Maryland hospitals. All have regular engagement with their faculty and hospital clinical mentors. Four of these graduate nurses have sought career counseling and academic advice from their mentors in year 2. New nurses consistently report encountering unanticipated challenges due to the rigors and demands of the profession; two participants considered leaving but have successfully changed jobs due to support provided by faculty and hospital mentors. Eleven student nurses have been recently accepted into the SPAN Program and have sought academic and career advice from SPAN faculty mentors and staff.

Conclusion: The first SPAN Mentor Training seminar was held in January of 2017; 11 nurses attended from three hospital partners currently employing SPAN participants. Mentors were selected by Nursing Leadership to mentor SPAN participants. Training addressed providing feedback, recognizing learning styles, conflict management and relationship building. The format of training was didactic with collaborative group discussion, encouraging mentors to share personal experiences and knowledge. Participants helped to design the mentorship component of the program. Ideas generated included strengthening the SPAN community by offering activities for mentors and participants to attend together, surveying participants to find out what they hope to get out of mentorship and providing additional mentor trainings. Feedback and suggestions will continue to be incorporated into program planning to develop and strengthen the SPAN mentorship model further.