Title  Academic Practice Partnership for Transformational Leadership Development and Translating Research into Practice.

Keywords  ‘Academic Practice Partnership’, research, leadership, nursing.

Goal  Increase the proportion of BSN nursing staff and develop internal leadership succession plan and expand research opportunities.

Background  South Shore Hospital (SSH) was on a Magnet journey in 2006 and the work of Dr. Linda Aikens was a compelling motivator to actively seek out an academic partner who could expand opportunities for advanced education for the incumbent workforce. The Nurse of the Future report of the Institute of Medicine and Robert Woods Johnson lends even more importance to the need for strong academic practice partnership to improve patient outcomes, ensure nurses are practicing to the fullest extent of their license and that nurses are invited to participate in important strategic planning for healthcare. In 2006, SSH had an incumbent RN workforce that was approximately 38% BSN. A hiring plan included preferential BSN hiring over ADN graduates but it was clear with our low turnover and vacancy rate that this strategy would not bring our proportion of BSN nurses up to goal. The decision was made to find an academic partner interested in bringing a rigorous BSN completion program onsite.

Process  Simmons College worked closely with South Shore Hospital to custom design a cohort-based curriculum that would further the strategic goals and initiatives of the hospital. Simmons College offered adjunct faculty opportunities for SSH educators to teach in the curriculum and as clinical instructors and preceptors while South Shore Hospital offered Simmons College students and faculty opportunities to conduct research at the hospital. A memorandum of understanding was created specifying the rights and obligations of both partners. Reduced rate tuition was offered because SSH paid the tuition up front each semester to the college so no student billing was required and because all classes were taught at SSH, there was minimal overhead. SSH worked creatively with the Human Resources department to work out a mechanism that allowed for direct payroll deductions for SSH cohort students. These strategies minimized out of pocket money, reduced barriers of time, travel, inconvenience and money, making the cohort a very appealing option for completing a BSN. The Chief Nursing Officer worked with the nurse managers to encourage and support them in ensuring that each student was given dedicated time away from work to attend classes. Resources of the medical librarian were also secured and our technology department supported the effort with electronic classroom development and technology infrastructure. Barriers were minimal since both sides had a clear understanding of the goals and what each could offer. The major barrier was that nurses often had not been back to school for 20-30 years and were not very technologically savvy. We developed a ‘Jumpstart” program to orient new cohorts on technology, writing styles, APA format and searching the literature for evidence. A lot of support was offered onsite to ease the transition. At times space became an issue as we increased the number of cohorts running at any one time but with careful planning and coordination via a dedicated administrative assistant both at Simmons and at SSH, these issues worked out.

Results  We are now on our 5th RN-BSN cohort. We also started and graduated two cohorts of Master’s in Health Care Administration and have graduated two cohorts of Master’s in Nursing Administration with a third cohort currently running. We have met our goal of increasing the proportion of BSNs by 2% per year (39% in 2009 to 47.6% in 2012, 56.7% 2015) and have doubled our proportion of master’s prepared nurses. To date we have graduated 54 BSN, 30 MHA, 26 MSN and we anticipate 17 more BSN graduates by Dec 2016 and 24 more MSN graduates in 2017 and 19 more BSN graduates by Dec 2018. Student evaluations of the cohort model have been incredibly positive and several of the BSN graduates have continued on to the master’s programs. Several graduates have accepted new positions within the organization that utilize their new skills. This fall we started our first DNP multisite cohort with 8 nurses from SSH participating. This will really help increase the research efforts at our facility.
Conclusions and Recommendations  The academic practice partnership has been a terrific success both in meeting its initial goals but also in developing an internal cadre of nursing with leadership skills who may form the leadership succession plan in the future. The Simmons College-South Shore Hospital partnership is an example of a ‘Best Practice’ that other colleges and healthcare organizations can learn from. Any interested organizations should spend sufficient time setting goals and expectations with partnering organizations. Clearly articulate roles and responsibilities in a formal legal contract. Ensure that processes and administrative support are available on both partnering organizations and that lines of communication are clearly delineated. Carefully work out the financial details and consider whether the practice site could pay for the courses and develop mechanisms for affordable payback perhaps through our successful approach with payroll deduction.

Selected References.

