

Innovation in Engaging Hospital Staff and University Faculty in Research

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Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this article was to describe an innovative faculty-staff engagement dinner that was conducted to enhance collaboration between university faculty and hospital staff. Specific steps used to develop the dinner, as well as outcomes gained, are discussed.

Background/Rationale: Collaborative relationships between academic and clinical nurses may promote nursing research and strengthen mutual interest. Unique stressors and demands of clinical and academic nursing often lead to isolated practice roles. Nursing may require new ways of facilitating collaboration between groups.

Description of the Project: A dinner supported by a health system was planned for nursing staff interested in conducting research. Faculty at 2 local universities interested in collaborating with nursing staff were invited. Forty participants attended, including 8 faculty from 2 universities, 17 staff nurses, and 16 nurse leaders. Seven collaborative research projects were initiated following the dinner meeting.

Interpretation/Conclusion: Faculty and nursing staff partnerships were established and led to research projects that focused on themes of improving quality. Faculty and nursing staff expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity to connect over shared research ideas.

Implications: Mechanisms for enhancing staff nurse and nurse faculty collaborative relationships are needed to promote nursing research that ensures evidence-based bedside practices. A dinner event was an innovative method to partner nurses at the bedside with faculty with expertise in research methods.

Keywords: nursing research | collaborative relationships | faculty research involvement | staff research involvement

Article:

Collaborative relationships between academic and clinical settings may be necessary to promote hospital-based nursing research and evaluate nursing practice. Many years ago, schools of nursing were routinely housed in clinical institutions. With movement of schools of nursing into colleges and universities, many collegial relationships were lost.¹ Mechanisms for enhancing staff nurse and nurse faculty collaborative relationships rarely exist in health care.

Passion for high-quality patient care and a desire to enhance nurses' status as professionals led the nursing research committee to launch an endeavor to integrate staff nurses and university faculty. An objective of the nursing research committee was to bring together a team of staff nurses to partner with nearby academic nurses by developing a faculty-staff engagement dinner. The partnership created by linking faculty and staff at the dinner setting was intended to enhance knowledge about clinical outcomes of nursing practice based on evidence obtainable through research efforts. All too often, interest does not lead to commitment. Instead of simply talking about research and collegial relationships on each side, the faculty-staff engagement dinner provided the framework, structure, and support to elevate interest to commitment. We believe staff nurses are better able to influence the decisions made concerning patient care delivery when they are knowledgeable about the outcomes of their practice based on evidence obtainable through research efforts. Our staff nurses recognize the importance of being involved in identifying clinical problems and have the desire to be involved with research that would improve patient care on their units. The hospital academic faculty partnership offers experienced research faculty an opportunity to facilitate and encourage research practices throughout our health system. Furthermore, the partnership fosters the nursing research committee's goals of conducting valid research that is clinically relevant and protects the safety and rights of subjects.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hospital or health care organizations and educational settings can work together to establish collaborative partnerships. The literature describes several ways in which organizational and educational settings have worked to regain collaborative partnerships. One collaborative partnership entitled, "Institute for Johns Hopkins Nursing," was created with the purpose of strengthening the relationship between Johns Hopkins Hospital's Department of Nursing and Johns Hopkins University of Nursing. The hospital-university relationship was stimulated by changes occurring in both environments, including decreased enrollment, aging faculty, and managed care changes. Partnership goals were to formalize a collaborative relationship, offer continuing education for nurses, and generate resources. The Johns Hopkins partnership resulted in enhancement of clinical care for patients, contemporary nursing education, and promoted leadership for nursing.¹

Another program described in the literature is the Practice-Research Model (PRM). The PRM model used a nursing research consultant to bring together academia and health care disciplines to promote nursing research. The PRM model used 4 key concepts to lead to successful collaboration: practice drives research, collegial partnership, collaborative ownership, and best practice. A program highlight was the formation of a partnership between registered nurses and academic nurses to utilize research that supported clinical practice.²

In the early 1990s, recognizing the need for collaboration, the La Trobe University School of Nursing and Midwifery and The Alfred Hospital worked together to develop The Alfred Clinical School of Nursing. The primary aim of the clinical school was to promote interdisciplinary and interinstitutional collaboration in health care delivery and research. Through their efforts, benefits for the school and the hospital included increased opportunities for clinical nursing research, exchange of ideas, and involvement in opportunities for clinical nurses to become involved in academic programs.³

FACULTY-STAFF ENGAGEMENT DINNER COLLABORATIVE MODEL

Structure

The planning committee consisted of a 7-member subgroup of the nursing research committee that included nurses from clinical practice areas within the health system and faculty from local schools of nursing. The team met to discuss how to conduct the gathering and who to invite. Timing was crucial, as the team wanted to ensure the dinner occurred while local schools of nursing were still in session. Dinner was provided at 5 PM on a weeknight to draw in more individuals. Discussion centered on ways to facilitate sharing among faculty and staff. The group brainstormed potential research interest areas and categorized discussions into 6 broad areas of interest: maternal-child, heart disease and diabetes, quality care outcomes and workforce initiatives, aging and chronic disease, behavioral health, and a miscellaneous category to support any unidentified interest area. The nursing research committee approved the planning committee's recommendations and provided financial support for dinner, table setups, and supplies.

An individual invitation to participate was sent to all universities. All hospital system staff nurses and department leaders were invited to participate. The planning team expected 20 participant responses for attendance. However, the response was overwhelming; approximately 40 participants attended the event, including 8 faculty from 2 universities, 17 staff nurses, and 16 nurse leaders. Responses from faculty and staff supported the belief that initiatives to collaborate around research were worthwhile and desired.

As part of a strategic plan, 6 round tables were set up to facilitate participants' discussion based on areas of interest. Areas of interest were identified using table tent name tags. Each table was supplied with flip charts, markers, masking tape, name tents, and a sign-up sheet for the group. During the course of the evening, a roster for each table was distributed, asking each individual

to complete contact information for future referencing. In addition, nursing school faculty provided faculty names and areas of interest to supplement collaboration.

The dinner started with the planning team leader welcoming everyone and providing information on procedures for the evening and expected outcomes. At the end of the dinner, the leader summarized the accomplishments of the evening.

Members of the planning team were designated as facilitators for each area of interest. The facilitator acted as a cheerleader to move the group toward a research goal before the end of the evening. During the brainstorming session, topics of interest were discussed, and each group selected at least 1 topic of interest that would be identified as a potential research project. The miscellaneous area of interest group focused on forensic, psychiatric, and trauma categories. At the conclusion of the work time, each table presented a 3- to 5-minute summary of the planned research activity. At the conclusion of the evening, table moderators identified partnerships to assist with follow-up between participants. The Blueprint for Success (Table 1) provides a checklist to help with organization of a faculty-staff engagement dinner.

Table 1. Faculty Engagement

Faculty-Staff Engagement Dinner
Blue Print for Success
Planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a team/elect a chair person
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide on an event theme (recommend a dinner)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide on target audience (recommend staff, clinical nurse specialists, clinical nurse, educator's, leadership, faculty at schools of nursing)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present administration, executive, staff to gain support of idea
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a date and time agreeable to target audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas of interest (topics) to focus on at the event (recommend broad topics of interest, have flexibility)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan the tempo of the event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Facilitator at each table of interest ○ Event facilitator ○ Registration (name tags, sign-in, contact rosters, etc) ○ Overall program (detail of what the program will look like) ○ Troubleshooting (if only 1 person at 1 of the tables, then what?)
Preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reserve and confirm location of event and dinner choices (room cost?)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a flyer/invitation for event
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute flyers/invitation to target audience; RSVP is a must
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send head count to caterer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final decision on topics to be focused on, room setup (recommend a table for each topic)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final decision of the flow/tempo of the evening

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan to make copies of rosters at each table for the audience
Immediately prior (day of)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather all supplies for the event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Confirm catering/confirm room reservation ○ Registration/check-in area ○ Flip charts ○ Pens/markers ○ Masking tape ○ Name tents ○ Simple decorations (vases, candy on tables, etc) ○ Rosters at each table-copy for the group the day of event ○ Room setup
The event
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome the audience and provide an overview of the event
Facilitators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Act as a cheerleader ○ Keep topic/discussion on track ○ Collect and distribute completed roster information to group ○ Conclusion: brainstormed topics presented to the entire group
Evaluation
Evaluate event
Roster from each table with contact information available for the audience
Facilitator for each table to follow up with an e-mail
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Minutes of brainstormed ideas ○ Encouraging continued collaboration
Lessons learned
Provide separate space (rooms) for each of the discussion groups, and reassemble the groups at the end for the summary of the accomplishments
Anticipate the potential for additional topic (unidentified interest areas) and have available extra tables and facilitators to accommodate the additional topics
Provide clerical support/assistance to help record discussions at each table

Committee Member Observations

University faculty who attended the dinner displayed interest in researching topics discussed that evening, provided mentorship to the health system staff, and guided the research process. As you walked into the room, the first thing you noted was the buzz of conversations about research interest as well as various research connections being initiated. The new partnerships established not only served as a catalyst to move nursing research forward, but also provided an excellent opportunity for networking connections.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ENGAGEMENT

Participants clearly identified the faculty-staff engagement dinner as a win-win situation. Connections and partnerships formed at the dinner have transcended the boundaries of the physical meeting and manifested into a strong commitment of the faculty from the schools of nursing and hospital staff. The initial engagement launched the framework and processes for staff to reach out and identify faculty who have an interest in specific research topics. Faculty and staff partnerships were established directly during the dinner and led to indirect connection opportunities after the dinner by linking the right people to the right project.

Newfound partnerships energized the nursing research committee. Partnerships boosted confidence, generated ideas and projects, and ensured research advancement. Partnerships enabled strategies for successful teaming up of clinical and research expertise, complementing the strengths of each member of the partnership. Bedside nurses viewed faculty as approachable and believed that research was achievable. Research experts on research projects increased staff nurses' level of confidence to pursue research. One staff nurse identified that the faculty-staff engagement dinner "increased the level of confidence to pursue research."

Benefits of clinician-academic nurse relationships were realized by faculty as well. Faculty had access to patients and staff interested in clinical research. In addition, faculty utilized staff as consultants, seeking guidance on patient populations or to gain a unique insight into a clinical issue being addressed.

The faculty-staff engagement dinner connected nurses from local universities and various campuses within the large health system to discuss ideas and issues related to patient care that could lend to research. Meeting outcomes were positive in that there was a shared interest in designing nursing research studies to enhance evidence-based practice. There was a shared cooperative spirit between group members. Each subgroup generated much discussion and excitement. Comments included "Why didn't we do this sooner?" and "I can't wait to get started."

Engagement with faculty nurses increased hospital nurse confidence to identify gaps in knowledge and provided necessary support to actively engage in research. The committee observed a new level of confidence that has led to the pursuit of new knowledge. In less than a year since the dinner, 7 research studies emerged, and in over an 18- to 24-month period, most have moved forward (Table 2).

Table 2. Research Study Outcomes 18 to 24 Months After the Faculty-Staff Engagement Dinner

Areas of Interest	Abandon	Approved by the IRB	Data Collection	Analysis	Presentation	Publication	Follow-up Studies
Surgical prep	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Bariatric surgery	X	X	X				

Aroma therapy		X	X				
Pitocin use		X	X				
Heart failure		X	X	X	X		
Research internship		X	X	X	X		
Critical thinking	X						

Abbreviation: IRB, institutional review board.

An example of a research study that emerged from the faculty-staff engagement dinner involved a group of perioperative nurses who were energized from the relationships formed at the dinner. These perioperative nurses with research ideas partnered with a PhD student from one of the local universities who had expressed interested in the newly conceptualized research initiative. The group began to meet and discuss research ideas, and a burning question emerged. Staff nurses were the content experts, and the PhD student supported and led the group as the research expert. This group successfully presented their study to the nursing research committee and the institutional review board, and the study was approved by both committees. Realizing the significance of adding new knowledge to the body of nursing science, the group submitted the review of literature for publication. Their manuscript was accepted and published in December 2010. In addition, the journal selected the article for their online discussion. Staff nurses involved in the project shared their story of research through poster and podium presentations at local and regional nursing conferences using the title, "What's for Dinner? ...Research: The Bedside Nurses Perspective on Research." The data collection phase of this study is nearing completion, and the group plans to publish and present the results. Because of this dynamic relationship, the PhD student gained valuable connections that enabled her to complete her dissertation sooner than expected.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING

A faculty-staff engagement dinner created partnerships between hospital and academic nurses that supported nurse inquiry about clinical practice and the conduct of nursing research. Reasons to embrace research are numerous. Research improves patient care outcomes by validating practices, identifying gaps in knowledge, identifying opportunities for change, and providing feedback on nursing interventions that lead to continuous improvement. The faculty-staff engagement dinner is a novel method to achieve success in embracing nursing research.

Furthermore, as a Magnet organization seeking redesignation, we wanted to ensure that we had a focus on new knowledge, innovations, and improvements. Nurses are required to evaluate and use research findings to provide the safest and best practices for their patients. Generating new

knowledge also enables nurses at all levels of the organization to improve their practice environments.

In conclusion, a faculty-staff engagement dinner facilitated partnerships between clinical and administrative health care nurses and academic researchers. Relationships extended over time, leading to research project developments and, in some cases, conduct of nursing research studies that may guide nursing practice in the future. The faculty-staff engagement dinner exemplifies our commitment to Magnet values with the ultimate goal of positive patient care outcomes. We encourage other hospital to think about a faculty-staff engagement dinner to encourage research among their nursing staff.

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