Mentorship Moves Science Forward

Investing our time and effort into the development of new nurse researchers is a crucial activity to build nursing science. Effective mentorship can accelerate research trajectory contributions of beginning researchers. This editorial reviews some key themes of successful mentorship.

Communication and Relationship

Clearly articulated expectations enable an effective relationship. Timely two-way open communication with generous use of questions is important in mentoring relationships. It is helpful if the mentor is willing to share his or her own challenging experiences. Mentees need confidence that they can reveal problems in a confidential relationship. Mentors can aid their mentees in building productive relationships with an extensive professional network. Certainly, there should be room for new relationships which will benefit the mentee and both parties should expect the relationship trajectory to change over time. Sometimes, the most effective action for a mentor is to transition a mentee to another mentor who can better support the mentee at that point in their trajectory.

Maintain Perspective

Mentors can help maintain perspective on the mentee’s real and perceived detours on the road to success. Although feelings of disappointment over lack of present success in some endeavor are normal, the mentor should ultimately assist the mentee in developing a broader perspective on such experiences. Mentors can help mentees develop effective emotional support strategies to deal with the inevitable detours on the road to success.

Goal Management

Mentoring involves helping the mentee achieve goals, so the relationship should emphasize both short- and long-term goals. Merely getting through the semester is not the kind of goal which builds meaningful research trajectories.
A multiyear career trajectory is crucial to keep the mentee focused on achieving significant contributions. Mentors need to help mentees differentiate immediate urgent issues from long-term goals to make the best decisions regarding allocating the mentee’s resources. While mentors help focus on long-term goals, their years of experience can be useful as the mentee considers new opportunities. The mentor can assist the mentee in determining the potential value of opportunities and whether to embrace, delay, or avoid them entirely. Mentors can assist mentees in developing strategies to achieve goals by engaging in continuous quality improvement activities. Mentors can facilitate analyzing work strategies to improve processes to achieve greater research productivity. This dual focus on specific goals and work processes will assist the mentee in achieving long-term success.

**Skill Development**

We often think of teaching mentees specific research skills, but there are other vital skills for beginning researchers. They need to learn skills to succeed in their workplace including committee member and chair skills, negotiation strategies, time management skills, team management activities, skills to give and receive constructive feedback, and the like. Risk appraisal and risk management are important skills as most courses of action entail some risk, and inaction also poses risks. Mentors can assist mentees in performing realistic appraisal of potential benefits and risks of specific actions.

**Writing**

Writing should be a central focus for beginning researchers. Writing clarifies thinking. Talk is cheap; writing moves ideas and projects forward. Mentors should focus on writing because writing enlarges the potential for impact beyond the local level. Projects are not truly complete until the findings have been disseminated to have an impact on patients or health care providers. Unpublished projects are merely hobbies. Effective mentorship needs to emphasize writing.

Successful mentorship is a gift which keeps on giving. When I contacted the corresponding authors of articles in this issue, everyone agreed that some mentor relationship existed among the coauthors (Farra, Miller, Timm, & Schafer, 2013; Hendrix, Landerman, & Abernethy, 2013; Kao, Gibbs, Clemen-Stone, & Duffy, 2013; Kramer et al., 2013; Small, Bonds-McClain, & Gannon, 2013; Wagner, McDonald, & Castle, 2013). Efforts by senior researchers to contribute to the success of the next generation are about
building the science nursing needs to improve patient outcomes. The importance of mentoring justifies giving our best effort to mentoring.

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References


