Executive Summary

To encourage retention in nursing administration while building leadership capacity, efforts must be made to support the manager’s practice and professional development. Functions and duties of the nurse manager need to be simplified and supplemental development materials need to be readily available. Innovations that organize necessary document templates and ease access to materials that enhance their leadership skills have real value. One institution’s innovation to build nurse manager capacity was an online portal for nurse managers. The site offers information that enriches the role of nurse manager and represents one supplemental pathway to continuous leadership development.

The role of nurse manager is the fundamental determinant of RN turnover and workplace outcomes. Developing nurse manager competency and their ability to lead is critical to enabling the establishment of healthy work environments. Competent nurse managers foster employee engagement that promotes workforce stability and job satisfaction. This stability and satisfaction builds the needed experience and expertise to improve patient care quality and safety. Initiatives that prolong the tenure and enhance professional development of current nurse managers will help dissuade the looming retirement threat that accompanies an aging nurse workforce.

The issue of nurse age is recognized as a growing factor in RN supply. Currently, 84% of the nursing profession falls into the ranks of Baby Boomer (born 1946-1964) or older making anticipated retirement from the profession a noteworthy factor in workforce planning (Kirschling, Colgan, & Andrews, 2011). To encourage retention in nursing administration while building leadership capacity, efforts must be made to support the manager’s practice and professional development. Functions and duties of the nurse manager need to be simplified and supplemental development materials need to be readily available. Innovations that organize necessary document templates and ease access to materials that enhance their leadership skills have real value.

Innovation

One institution’s innovation to build nurse manager capacity was an online portal for nurse managers. It included leadership and management strategies that provide action tools that inform hiring and retention success, and it clusters institutional forms and policies for convenience. The site offers information that enriches the role of nurse manager and represents one supplemental pathway to continuous leadership development.

The Manager Portal is a window through which nurse managers gain access to a wealth of information relevant to enhanced role performance. Developed over a brief 4 months, this institution-wide innovation responded to voiced needs of frontline nurse managers. Their primary concerns include increased workload and inefficiencies resulting from storage of materials in multiple web site locations. Knowing the pivotal role of nurse managers in RN retention, the recruitment and retention department prioritized action that addressed these issues. Although the challenge was identified in the fall of 2010, active brainstorming about the elements of this innovation began in March 2011 with the nurse recruitment and retention team identifying essentials of design and lists of content to be included inside the portal. The company managing the University of Michigan Health System (UMHS) Nurse Recruitment and Retention web site started to build the Manager Portal platform in mid April. Over 6 weeks, recruiters worked to populate the web site with documents required by nurse managers. They included or created materials that nurse managers use to clarify issues related to recruitment, hiring, retention, and performance and listed useful links. Testing occurred in late June and it launched a month later. The web site portal offers a solution in one convenient, easy to navigate location. Its intent is two-fold:

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An Online Portal to Support the Role of the Nurse Manager

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To ease the work of nurse managers through electronically organizing resources to aide in attracting and recruiting, selecting and hiring, employee engagement, on-boarding, and performance management.

To provide information to support the professional development of leaders.

Within these broad categories, in one click, the nurse manager finds institution-specific forms, templates that can guide action as well as materials that provide the essential elements important to their success. Moreover, the portal design allows easy, periodic insertion of messages on a “What’s New” bar to:

- Help managers track, interpret, and communicate change initiatives.
- Acknowledge and share best practices developed internally.
- Recognize the personal achievements of individual managers/supervisors.
- Announce placement of new services available on the web site.

Site Development

Designed to be a dynamic resource, information and links continue to be added. Nurse recruiters populate the portal with up-to-date materials. For example, upon completion of union negotiations, recruiters added a link to the new nursing contract. This simple addition of a link clusters access to this document with other employment documents. All are now accessed through one portal. To maximize site usefulness, nurse managers are encouraged to contact recruiters with suggestions that enhance the site. Managers have requested the addition of information on termination of access for temporary employees; a link to the occupational health web site; the nursing department staffing model in an Excel spreadsheet; and a “click” to look up nursing license status.

The actual image associated with the portal is a buoy-like color-coded design with a block M in the center. One manager noted, “This site is a life-saver and the logo reflects that” (see Figure 1).

The current health care environment requires confident frontline nurse managers who engage with staff while overseeing the daily functions of a clinical unit. The Manager Portal directly serves nurse managers and provides opportunity for greater efficiency and personal growth. In one click the manager can access the form to initiate a new job posting and, with a second click, can submit the completed form. Moreover, managers can review materials on best hiring practices that include sample interview questions. Under “Additional Resources,” the portal houses links to development opportunities such as campus leadership training schedules, an audio-video resource library, and videos of recent nursing leadership training days as well as links to master’s and PhD programs offered through the University of Michigan School of Nursing. Here too can be found support for a variety of managerial tasks such as a guide to constructive delivery of performance evaluations.

Site Launch

Introduction of the new web site involved unveiling at a monthly leadership meeting designed to share institutional and nursing information and attended by the chief nursing officer, nursing directors, nurse managers, and supervisors.

Recruiters “walked” nurse managers through the portal, revealing the resources found behind each “click.” Sensitive materials stored on the site require password access that each manager and supervisor received at this time. Recruiters made it clear they were available to field questions at all times including what materials were available for the nurse managers. Launch strategy included the use of periodic e-mails announcing and describing new additions to the Manager Portal that encourage nurse managers to revisit the web site, learning the value and positioning of new content over time.

A notable advantage of a web site is the ability to post changes quickly while concurrently alerting users to the presence of new material. Future addition of audio/video materials and coursework, and/or establishing online groups and virtual sessions, represent exciting ways in which to enrich the site.
Impact

The Manager Portal has been operative almost 1 year. Nurse manager response has been extremely positive. In the 8 operational months, the Manager Portal has had 1,527 hits (late July 2011 through April 2012). Convenient retrieval of documents that make this web site a one-stop destination explains its popularity. Furthermore, ready access to best practices defined in the literature or by in-house clinical units also increases potential for incorporating positive practices that may be new to a manager/supervisor.

Antidotal feedback indicates that we have met our goal to develop an evolving, helpful web site specifically designed for nurse managers. Managers say they use and rely upon it. They view the portal as “the place I go to find everything.” One offers, “I’ve accessed everything from the rules on staff tuition reimbursement to employee engagement survey results for nursing and my specific unit. It’s quick and has what I need.” Others tout the efficient path to posting a job and hiring afforded by this site as the best feature. They now easily pull résumés for all candidates, are able to confirm license status, and instantly know if applicants are internal or external candidates. This saves a great deal of time.

Given the high impact managers have on nurse turnover and care quality, attention to leadership retention and development becomes essential in a successful health care facility. Such development needs to go beyond the traditional, formal classroom. For those who effectively lead professionals, leadership development is a continual process and involves classroom activities, relevant reading, problem-solving tools, and more. The Manager Portal provides another resource for leadership development and can be accessed at the learners’ convenience.

High-speed change and transformation will only increase as provision of health care in an acute setting evolves. Such “adjustment” will require nurse managers to adopt strategies different from those used today. To create truly effective, sustainable systems in this increasingly complex environment, efficiencies will need to be developed that help frontline leaders manage.

Turnover expenditures associated with recruitment, hiring, and orientation take financial resources that can be used elsewhere. Dollars from the nursing budget once spent to fill vacant positions can now be spent to enhance development of tenured nurses, to provide additional support for development and implementation of a new professional practice model, and for other innovations that benefit nursing. Assisting nurse managers in any way that facilitates their work, lessens their stress, or offers valued help is not just nice – it is necessary. It can contribute to meeting the important goal of increasing job satisfaction and decreasing turnover.

REFERENCE