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Core Competencies for Entry to Practice Nurses: Faculty and Practice Perceptions

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Abstract

Background: Preparing and strengthening the next generation of new nurses requires strong academic-practice collaborative practices.

Objectives: In 2021 we completed an 18-month, IRB exempt, Vizient/AACN Nurse Residency Program (NRP) funded research study to develop an NRP competency-based model as a seamless continuum to transition new RNs from education to practice.

Methods: Using a mixed-method, multiphase approach, we surveyed and met in focus groups with faculty and practice leaders across Maryland. First, participants were surveyed using the 109 learning outcomes from the 2008 AACN Nursing's Essentials of Baccalaureate Education. Faculty were asked how well their program met, partially met, or did not meet each outcome. Similarly, practice leaders were asked how well each new nurse resident met each outcome. To understand the survey responses, results were shared with faculty and practice participants through focus groups then faculty members from the 27 Maryland nursing programs and 41 acute care hospitals were invited to participate.

Results: Over 50% of the participants completed the surveys and attended the focus groups. We examined the learning outcomes faculty perceived their programs always successfully met to identify the entry-level core competencies common to pre-licensure programs. One hundred percent of the participants perceived their programs always met seven of the learning outcomes, and 90 % always met 18. The learning outcomes met were in three of the nine Essentials: Information Management, Professionalism, and Generalist Nursing Practice. For the other 91 outcomes, faculty perceived their programs partially or did not meet. By program type, AD and BSN/MSN faculty perceptions significantly differed on 6 of the 109 competencies suggesting few differences in student competency attainment based on the type of nursing program. Learning outcomes with the most commonalities were in clinical practice, whereas BSN programs were more likely to meet leadership and research outcomes. Faculty and hospital leader perceptions significantly differed on 107 out of the 109 competencies. Qualitative data themes creating this divide were the influence of NCLEX on faculty preparation of students, which also helps explain the similarities among all nursing programs and practice leaders' desire for practice-ready nurses. Faculty described many topics as challenging to teach and required immersive clinical experiences during nursing school and residency to gain competency.

Conclusion: Findings underpin the criticality of NRP programs for all new nurses to support them in their transition to professional nurses. However, competing priorities for faculty are a problem. These include NCLEX and accreditation concerns, teaching the "need to know" versus "nice to know" due to overcrowded curriculum and instructional time constraints, and getting students ready to go out the door. Moving forward, leaders must align faculty and practice expectations of new nurses, strengthen student experiential learning and examine the impact of NCLEX & accreditation on BSN/entry MS education.