Building Academic-Practice Partnerships: Sharing Best Practices

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Academic-practice partnerships are a critical key to strengthen nursing practice and assist nursing in leading change and advancing health care in our communities. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) Future of Nursing report, released in 2010, identified the need for nurses to achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.

Although the IOM report brought the need to the forefront, the necessity for successful partnerships between academic and practice had been identified prior to the release of the report. In 2008, the Advisory Board’s Nursing Executive Center published a report detailing the results of an extensive survey of service and academic leaders that identified gaps in 36 competencies in newly graduated nurses. Also in 2008, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) reported that US nursing schools turned away more than 40,000 qualified applicants from baccalaureate nursing programs because of an insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, and limited classroom space. This number grew to more than 65,000 qualified applicants in 2010, with lack of clinical preceptors and budgetary restraints added to the original reasons for not accepting qualified applicants.

Prior to the release of the IOM report, AONE and AACN identified this critical need and formed the AACN-AONE Task Force on Academic Practice Partnerships to initiate a national dialogue on current and future best practices in academic-practice partnerships. As part of this ongoing work, the 2 organizations convened a 2-day summit in April 2013 in Chicago, “Implementing Successful Academic-Practice Partnerships: Setting the Stage.”

The summit brought together over 50 teams of nurse leaders and their academic partners from across the country. Throughout the summit, the teams heard best practices from colleagues who have developed and sustained models for partnerships that are goal-driven and outcome-focused and have proven to be mutually beneficial. In addition to hearing best practices, additional resources that have been developed by the AACN-AONE Task Force were presented and shared.

Collaborating to Transform From a Sick Care System to a Health Care System

The summit opened with a preconference session led by Melanie Dreher, PhD, RN, FAAN, dean of Rush University College of Nursing in Chicago, IL. Dr. Dreher and her team shared the current Graduate Nurse Education (GNE) model at Rush University that was made possible through a culture of collaboration with their practice partner, led by Rush University Medical Center Chief Nursing Officer Cynthia Borginere, DNPC, RN, FACHE.

Administered by the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS), the GNE initiative is a 4-year demonstration project mandated by the Affordable Care Act. The goal of the initiative is to increase the number of APRNs trained to meet the anticipated increase in health care demand. Dr. Dreher shared the Rush model of transforming a “sick care” system into a health care system by providing a learning environment in which students learn to practice in sites that are platforms of innovation, preparing graduates to lead change. As part of the CMS demonstration project, 5 medical centers partnering with a school of nursing, including Rush University School of Nursing, were awarded GNE funds. First year outcomes included charity clinic training for nurse practitioner students, the development of illness/self-management wellness models, and on-site employer-based clinics addressing the needs of low- to middle-income employees.

Dr. Dreher shared important first year lessons, including the understanding that GNE only opens the door, it is necessary to establish mutual benefit to sustain strong partnerships, and project teams must invest time in relationship-building and sustaining. To date, the initiative has resulted in increased graduation rates of advanced practice nurses, practice improvements and innovation, and graduates who are equipped to lead change.
HEALTHY CHICAGO: PROGRESS TOWARD IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF A COMMUNITY

The summit officially opened with a keynote delivered by Bechara Choucair, MD, commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health, who described numerous innovative and forward-thinking programs that are part of the city's first-ever comprehensive public health strategy. Dr. Choucair shared that the goal of the initiative served as a blueprint for a focused approach to implement policies, develop systems, and develop environmental changes that will prioritize initiatives and transform the health of the city's residents over the next 5 years.

Key outcomes of the initiative focus on reducing tobacco use, obesity prevention, HIV prevention, access to health care, violence prevention, adolescent health, and many other key health factors. He shared numerous programs that have been executed to target these measures. One example was programs put into place to fight obesity in the city, which included the addition of 27 miles of buffered and protected bike lanes, 500 new bike racks throughout the city, the addition of over 13 licensed fruit/vegetable carts to provide fresh food in currently defined food deserts, and the addition of farmers' markets throughout the city.

Dr. Choucair shared with the group that the program has been successful as a result of true and courageous partnerships that have a mutual commitment and focus on achieving specific and measurable outcomes. His presentation did an excellent job of setting the stage for the remainder of the summit.

SHARING BEST PRACTICES—SUCCESSFUL MODELS OF ACADEMIC-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS

The second day of the summit opened with a presentation on an existing academic-practice partnership between the Arizona State University College of Nursing and Health Innovation and Mayo Clinic. Summit attendees learned about an innovative multidimensional partnership approach that included partnering with the Mayo Clinic to expand clinical training opportunities and collaboration with the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts to provide innovative learning experiences that link health care and building design.

In addition to these partnerships, they established a partnership with Banner Health to strengthen the array of opportunities for RN to BSN nurses and other nursing education pathways and with Scottsdale Healthcare to increase the primary care nursing
workforce in Arizona. These innovative approaches are rich with examples of how developing partnerships and sustaining relationships based on shared goals and fueled by mutual trust result in demonstrated high-level outcomes.

In the afternoon, attendees learned about 3 additional current academic-practice models that included presentations from the University of Michigan’s School of Nursing and Health System; the Birmingham Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing; the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Nursing, and the Shawano-Menominee Counties Health Department.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT AND BUILD PARTNERSHIP-DEVELOPING ACTION PLANS

A primary goal of the 2-day summit was not only to allow participants to hear about currently successful models but also to advance their partnerships or begin new ones. To help provide resources to begin this journey, members of the AACN-AONE Academic-Practice Partnerships Task Force provided an overview of resources available currently on both the AONE and AACN Web sites, including Guiding Principles for Successful Academic-Practice Partnerships, an interactive toolkit to facilitate the development, growth, and evaluation of partnerships, and an online collaboration community that provides a forum to share information and resources, learn about innovative partnerships, discuss ways to measure success, connect with potential partners in specific regions, and network with peers. In addition to these resources, the presentations from this summit are available on the and AACN Web sites at www.aacn.nche.edu.

The group also received a newly developed partnership expectations and outcomes matrix that allowed them to map out partnership goals, activities, and outcome. Attendees spent the afternoon working in academic-practice pairs to develop specific strategies for their organizations to build, rebuild, or enhance their partnership activities. Each group left the summit with a detailed action plan.

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING COLLABORATIONS

The summit provided the opportunity for dialogue that was rich and meaningful. Participants engaged with presenters and members of the steering committee to reinforce the idea that this important work needs to continue. By continuing to share best practices, models can be replicated and modified to meet the specific needs and cultures of other partnering organizations. Only by continuing this important work of building successful academic-practice partnerships and sharing best practices can we advance the future of the profession to change health care in the United States.

AACN-AONE Academic-Practice Partnerships Resources

The following resources are available at www.aacn.nche.edu.

- Guiding Principles for Academic-Practice Partnerships
  Endorsed by both AACN and AONE, these 8 guiding principles will help nursing leaders to develop collaborative arrangements based on common goals, mutual respect, and shared knowledge.

- Interactive Tool Kit for Developing and Sustaining Partnerships
  This tool kit was designed to facilitate the development, growth, and evaluation of academic-practice partnerships as a fundamental condition to advance nursing practice and improve the quality of care. In addition to exemplars, the resources were created to guide the user from start to finish in developing a partnership.

- Partnership Expectation and Outcome Matrix

- Articles and Presentations

- Literature Review on Academic-Practice Partnerships
  This table contains a detailed summary of the literature on academic-practice partnerships for the past decade.

- Survey on Academic-Practice Partnerships
  This document summarizes the data from the national survey on partnerships conducted with deans, chief nurse officers, and directors of community health/public health agencies.

- Focus Group Sessions
  Findings from a series of AACN-AONE focus groups include details on current practices, barriers, successful partnerships, and recommendations related to academic-practice partnerships.
References

Care Innovation and Transformation (CIT) initiative fosters a culture of care excellence where innovation is linked to quality improvement and leadership development. Inpatient and outpatient units nationwide move through the two-year program together, participating in face-to-face meetings, monthly conference calls and webinars.

The CIT initiative teaches nursing and interdisciplinary teams how to innovate and measure change, strengthening the organization from the bottom-up.

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