

An Innovative Peer Mentoring Program to Augment Clinical Experiences

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Objectives:



To introduce an innovative peer mentoring program designed to enhance clinical experiences in a nursing program.



To explain the benefits and potential impact of implementing a peer mentoring program in a nursing program, including improved student learning outcomes, increased confidence, and enhanced professional development.



To provide practical guidance and strategies for implementing a successful peer mentoring program in a nursing program.

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Assumptions:

The mentoring relationship provides growth for emerging nurses, such as moderating the lack of knowledge and experience and improving collaboration (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021).

Mentoring also contributes to the development of a resilient nursing workforce by fostering leadership skills and overall professional development for both the mentor and mentee (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021).

In an academic context, peer mentoring relationships foster student-centered learning (Andersen & Watkins, 2018; Carlson et al., 1989).

A successful mentorship relationship benefits the mentee and mentor facilitating mutual growth and learning (Andersen & Watkins, 2018).


Mentorship plays a vital role in the progression of novice nurses to expert practitioners, and the skills acquired as a mentor can guide future mentoring experiences throughout a nurse's career (Andersen & Watkins, 2018; Benner, 1984).

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Background:

- During the COVID pandemic, significant modifications were needed in a clinical practicum for sophomore students' which focused on the care of older adults.
- Rather than having in-person clinical experiences in a skilled nursing facility, 2nd semester students cared for virtual patients through Digital Clinical Experiences.
- Senior students mentored sophomore students in this virtual environment, helping them enhance their learning.
- The senior students had prior clinical experience with specific patient situations, enabling them to provide context for patient care scenarios.

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The theoretical support for this mentorship program was based upon Benner's Novice to Expert Theory (1984), which describes the progression of nursing knowledge. Sophomore nursing students were considered novice nursing students, while senior nursing students were classified as advanced beginners.

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Description of Program:

The mentoring program was a requirement for senior and sophomore students with assigned course points for each student.

Senior students in their final semester were randomly paired with a sophomore student (second semester).

Senior students were provided with student contact information during the first week of the semester to enable the mentoring relationship to begin in the second week.

Students were expected to schedule to meet weekly twelve times during the semester in person or via Zoom as part of the assigned course work.



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Aims:

- The program aimed to allow sophomore students to debrief virtual clinical experiences with a senior nursing student to assist their development of critical thinking skills.
- Enabled senior students to review knowledge and previous experiences and improve their critical thinking while also acquiring meaningful mentoring skills.

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Preparation for the Mentors:



A mentoring program guidebook was developed by a committee comprised several faculty who taught senior and sophomore students.



Senior students were given a mentoring program guidebook outlining expectations of the program and clinical case studies from the digital clinical experiences.



Seniors attended an orientation meeting to review mentoring expectations and how to give feedback to mentees.



Before the mentoring experience, they were required to watch two videos about mentoring.

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Mentor Expectations:

The senior student mentors were responsible for contacting their assigned sophomore student during the first week of class.

The mentee-mentor determined weekly meeting times (~1 hour).

At the weekly meetings, mentors facilitated mentees' learning by asking reflective and contextual questions regarding the care of the DCE patients.

Mentors provided verbal feedback to mentees during the weekly meetings and discussed goals for improvement.

Each senior mentor also sent a weekly email to the mentee's sophomore clinical instructor, including feedback on the learning experiences of the mentee.

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Results:

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A total of 116 sophomore students, 123 senior students, and ten faculty participated in this peer mentoring program and evaluation during the first year.

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Most students reported benefiting from the mentoring program, sophomore students more strongly agreed that they benefited (Mean = 7.1; SD = 2.3) compared to senior students (Mean = 6.1; SD = 2.4)

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Sophomores also were more likely to indicate that they would participate in the program if it were not mandatory (72%) compared to 62% of seniors.

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Lessons Learned & Changes:

- Our peer mentoring program no longer includes Digital Clinical Experiences.
- Senior and sophomore students attend an orientation about the program where they are introduced to one another, and their roles and expectations are explained.
- Our current peer mentoring program requires senior students to meet with sophomores bi-monthly during the 15-week semester.
- Using Tanner's model, senior students now ask and facilitate sophomore students to "Think like a nurse" while using questions about *noticing, interpreting, responding, and reflecting* (Tanner, 2006).
- The sessions start with a fun get-to-know-you questionnaire, six sessions focusing on Tanner's model (2006), and a final session for closure reflection and establishing goals.

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Questions

