

Exemplary Academic Practice Partnership Award

Partnership Foundation: The University of Tennessee Health Science Center's (UTHSC) College of Nursing's (CON) academic-practice partnership with Le Bonheur Children's Hospital (LBCH) was designed to mutually benefit both partners by enhancing the practice of nursing and the preparation of future nurses while simultaneously improving patient outcomes, thus embracing the vision of Advancing Healthcare Transformation: A New Era for Academic Nursing. This innovative academic-practice partnership was initiated whereby advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) at LBCH, transitioned into full-time faculty roles in the CON at UTHSC. The APRNs maintained their full clinical practice and, in addition, became formally aligned with the CON. This academic-practice partnership supports both the work of the APRNs as expert clinicians providing patient care and the college's teaching mission by engaging these faculty in teaching across undergraduate and graduate academic programs. Both practice partner site institutions are committed to creating a sustainable academic nursing model, with the New Era Report serving as the philosophical guide.

Academic Partner: The UTHSC CON is one of six colleges in an academic health center located in the urban core of Memphis, TN. The CON offers a highly educated, research-oriented faculty with a focus on developing nursing leaders. The College currently offers a 12-month, second-degree accelerated BSN program, a traditional, four-semester BSN program, and a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program with eight concentrations and three dual DNP concentrations. Our PhD in nursing is offered through the College of Graduate Health Sciences.

Practice Partner: LBCH is a 255-bed Magnet-designated, free-standing children's hospital. LBCH is home to over 45 pediatric specialties with an average of 418,000 outpatient visits per year. Prior to the establishment of the academic practice partnership with the UTHSC CON, the hospital had ongoing collaborations and relationships with the UTHSC. This included APRNs who were employed as staff of the College of Medicine and aligned with the CON.

Partnership Benefits Integrating APRNs into the academic clinical faculty role enhances the clinical practice of nursing and the preparation of future nurses. CON students at all levels gain access to clinical experts who are actively practicing in various specialties. CON teaching faculty benefit by having ready access to clinical experts from a large pool of APRNs who have a dedicated portion of their effort assigned to teaching. Pediatric expertise has been invaluable for clinical rotations, mentorship, and teaching at the doctoral and undergraduate level. The APRNs, as clinical faculty, have enhanced opportunities for professional development, educational advancement through a tuition waiver program, support for conference attendance, and additional educational and scholarly opportunities through the CON.

Academic Practice Partnership Development and Implementation: Before initiating the academic-practice partnership, key stakeholders from both organizations were identified. The key stakeholders agreed that the APRNs, LBCH, and the CON would benefit if the APRNs transitioned from their current roles as associates at LBCH or staff employees in the College of Medicine to a formal faculty role within the CON, thus allowing the APRNs to follow a nursing model and to promote full implementation of several of the New Era Model's aims. The team negotiated the effort assigned to the new role of APRN clinical faculty, 95% clinical practice and 5% teaching. Before transitioning into the CON, the APRNs and CON leaders, including the Dean, Department Chairs, and Program Directors, met regularly. Discussions were held with the clinical faculty to explore the various avenues to contribute to their 5% teaching effort and orient them to their CON faculty role.

Communication between the academic and clinical institution was critical to ensure a smooth transition while following both institutions' policies and procedures, including HR considerations.

Before initiating the academic-practice partnership, key stakeholders from both organizations addressed the need for a leadership role to serve as an operational bridge between institutions. The CON, led by the Dean, proposed hiring a Director of Advanced Practice (AP Director) to meet this need. Interviews incorporated a shared governance process and included critical leaders from all institutions. This approach reflected the partnership's ongoing commitment to enacting AACN's vision for collaborative workforce planning at the leadership level. After careful deliberation, an AP Director was hired as full time CON faculty with efforts assigned to teaching, practice, administration, and service. The AP Director supports the APRNs within LBCH and has collaborated with the CON Department Chairs to implement standardized hiring, onboarding, mentoring, and clinical faculty evaluations. In addition, the AP Director supports the APRNs practicing to the full extent of their license and certification. The CON Department Chairs remain engaged and active with the clinical faculty, providing professional development and mentorship to support full integration into the faculty role.

Key stakeholders worked together to develop the following partnership goals 1) Expand the APRNs practice through active participation in professional organizations to further develop scholarship, leadership, and research opportunities; 2) Support academic nursing as a full partner in health care delivery; 3) Connect clinical practice to the academic mission of the CON and develop joint clinical research to improve patient outcomes; and 4) Collaborate as partners to improve the health of the community and access to care for the underserved. Goal activities and outcomes are described in the metric worksheet.

The blending of clinical practice and academia is a multifaceted endeavor and an ongoing challenge. Communication between the AP Director and key leaders within each institution is vital to the model's success. The AP Director has a leadership role in the CON and serves on the CON Executive Committee. In addition to frequent communication between the AP Director and key leaders at each institution, creating a network with AP leaders outside of these institutions was essential. The role of the AP Director was new to the CON and LBCH thus establishing supportive professional relationships with other AP leaders throughout the country was a priority.