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Selecting Partners

Academic School: University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing

Contact: Doreen C. Harper, PhD, RN, FAAN

Phone Number: (205) 934-5360

E-mail Address: dcharper@uab.edu

Practice Setting: Birmingham Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Contact: Cynthia Cleveland, DNP, RN, NE-BC

Phone Number: (205) 933-4386

E-mail Address: Cynthia.Cleveland@va.gov

Preparing for Your First Meeting

Date/Time of Meeting: 2009

Place of Meeting: UAB School of Nursing

What do you and your partner need to know about you and your organization?

The UAB School of Nursing (UABSON) and Birmingham VA Medical Center (BVAMC) have had an ongoing partnership since 2009. The initial partnership began with joint planning and development of an application for a VA Nursing Academy and a shared vision of transforming the care of Veterans and their families. Through this initial partnership, UABSON and the BVAMC had an opportunity to: increase the recruitment and retention of nursing students and graduates into the VA nursing workforce; increase the number of students educated about the population specific needs of Veterans; develop and expand faculty expertise among VA master's-prepared nurses and UABSON faculty with a focus on the delivery of health care for Veterans; and expand partnership opportunities in education, clinical service, and evidenced-based practice to improve quality outcomes. This partnership links institutional missions and governance and creates a pipeline for the development of VA Nurse Scholars and faculty.

PARTNERSHIPS

Initial Meeting

What is the right partnership activity for you and your partner?

Our initial partnership developed around plans to submit an application for a VA Nursing Academy (now called VA Nursing Academic Partnership or VANAP). This joint endeavor was the right partnership for us in 2009 and resulted in a funded proposal whereby undergraduate nursing students complete their clinical rotations at the BVAMC and have a curriculum that focuses on the special care of Veterans. These clinical experiences will enhance knowledge so that nursing students are better prepared to care for our Veteran population upon graduation. Students and graduates help the BVAMC and Veterans integrated Service Network (VISN) 7 to provide and improve access to care for Veterans living in Alabama and surrounding states.

What documents about your organization should you bring to the meeting?

The UAB School of Nursing Strategic Plan, Vision, and Mission, as they are closely linked with our VA partnership goals of increasing access for Veterans, improving their quality of care, and developing a nursing workforce educated to transform the care of Veterans .

What do you have to offer?

Twenty (20) students per year are selected as VA Nurse Scholars and participate in a Veteran-centric curriculum and dedicated educational unit (DEU) at the BVAMC. They are taught by UABSON and BVAMC joint faculty. In addition, we guide faculty whose research and practice interests align with BVAMC strategic plans toward collaborative BVAMC projects, and we facilitate the students' progress through the nursing academic program. We provide appropriate academic faculty appointments to qualified VA nurses and provide access to university-based professional development programs. Thanks to our UABSON Board of Visitors Endowed VA Nursing Scholarship, we are also positioned to award scholarships to VA nurses and students committed to the care of Veterans, and we also match contributions for up to three Jonas doctoral student Veterans Scholarships annually for UAB VANAP faculty and/or VA employed nursing students.

What is your vision for this partnership and does your partner share this vision?

Our shared vision is transforming the care of Veterans and their families and our partnership provides a groundbreaking approach toward achieving that vision. Undergraduate nursing students complete their clinical rotations at the BVAMC and have a curriculum that focuses on the special care of Veterans and their families. These clinical experiences enhance knowledge so that nursing students are better prepared to care for our Veteran population upon graduation. This partnership results in many benefits for both partners, including: an expanded enrollment of active duty and Veteran students; embedding Veteran centric content throughout all didactic and clinical courses for more than 1,320 baccalaureate nursing students to date; reducing recruitment and onboarding costs for BVAMC by hiring VA Nurse Scholars upon graduation; enhancing bedside practice initiatives; and disseminating joint scholarly work, including 40 peer-reviewed publications and 80 professional presentations.

Who else needs to be involved in both organizations? Is top leadership involved?

In addition to the co-directors dedicated to overseeing the management of this program and UABSON and BVAMC faculty involved in the program, top leadership from both organizations play an important role. The BVAMC's Associate Director/Patient Care Services, Associate Chief of Staff for Education, Chief of Patient Care Services, Medical Center Director, and VISN Director are all actively involved in the program through their respective service on its Steering Committee, along with the UABSON Dean and Associate Dean for Clinical and Global Partnerships.

What is the business case for the partnership?

The initial business case for the partnership was to transform nursing education and practice within the VA in a manner similar to that resulting from the close and long-standing partnership between the VA and the nation's medical schools. Ultimately, the result would be to: 1) improve care and satisfaction with care for Veterans and their families; 2) increase the knowledge of nurses prepared to provide high quality care for Veterans, and 3) increase recruitment and retention of nurses within the VA health system, thus reducing costs.

Subsequent Meetings

Do you have clarity on goals and vision?

Yes. The goals of our original partnership are (a) expand faculty and professional development, (b) increase student enrollment, (c) provide opportunities for educational and practice innovations, and (d) increase recruitment and retention of VA nurses. Our mutually agreed upon VA Mental Health Residency goals are (a) increase veteran satisfaction with health, education, and counseling by increasing the numbers of Mental Health Nurse Practitioners (MHNPs) who will make vital contributions to the primary mental health care of Veterans, especially those living in Alabama, (b) employ innovative approaches to the development, implementation, and evaluation of the interprofessional MHNP residency, and (c) create veteran-centric three-trimester clinical experiences that promote high quality clinical skill development for MHNP students. Our VANAP-GE goals are (a) expand faculty and professional development, (b) recruit students for the program and increase clinical training capacity, (c) enhance CRNP and PMHNP recruitment into BVAMC and retain VANAP students and CRNPs at BVAMC, (d) provide opportunities for education and practice innovations aligned with Veteran care, (e) enhance the post-graduate PMHNP residency, and (f) develop interprofessional PMHNP education.

What are the details and time line of the initiative?

The VA Nursing Academy was created to address the predicted long-term nursing shortage, projected to be more acute within the VA because of the older average age of nurses and to recruit and retain baccalaureate nurses with the knowledge and skills to improve Veteran's health care. Over time, however, the goals shifted toward patient safety and quality and increased access to health care for Veterans and their families. As one of five funded programs in the 2009 cohort, the BVAMC and UABSON were funded for a 5-year pilot period through September 2014. The partnership is now maintained by both partners contributing the resources to sustain it.

Whom can we call for expert consultation if needed?

Doreen C. Harper, PhD, RN, FAAN - Dean and Fay B. Ireland Endowed Chair, UAB School of Nursing
Cynthia Cleveland, DNP, RN - Chief Executive Nurse, Birmingham VA Medical Center
Kimberly Froelich, PhD, RN - Associate Chief Nurse for Education, Birmingham VA Medical Center
Randy Moore, DNP, RN - Assistant Professor and VANAP co-director, UAB School of Nursing
Cynthia S. Selleck, PhD, RN, FAAN - Associate Dean for Clinical and Global Partnerships, UAB School of Nursing
Teena McGuinness, PhD, PMHNP, FAAN - Professor & Interim Department Chair, UAB School of Nursing
Susanne Fogger, DNP, PMHNP - Associate Professor, UAB School of Nursing

What are the expected outcomes of the activity?

The opportunities provided to the students and faculty (UABSON and BVAMC) in this partnership not only lay the foundation for VA nursing careers as opposed to positions, but also for nursing faculty and leadership development among VA nurses. This program exists in a time when state resources are limited and qualified students are being denied admission due to a shortage of faculty. This program addresses the faculty shortage and also provides a pathway for program graduates to fill job vacancies left by the resignations or retirements of BVAMC nurses. School of Nursing faculty with expertise in patient safety and quality research are able to provide added expertise to BVAMC quality improvement and safety initiatives to assist in research design and analysis techniques, furthering both UABSON's and BVAMC's goals to increase collaborative research, presentations, and publications. Ultimately, of course, the goal is improved care and increased access to care for Veterans and their families.

ENVIRONMENT

Time

Is this the right time for this partnership?

Yes. Considering the dire need to provide and improve access to care for Veterans living in Alabama and surrounding states, this partnership is important and needed at this critical time for Veterans. The BVAMC-UABSON is an especially important locale for such an innovative effort because of the high proportion of Veterans who live in Alabama. The State of Alabama has approximately 415,000 living Veterans and has deployed the third-highest number of service men and women to Iraq and Afghanistan, including active duty and reservists from every county in the state. Educating nurses and nursing students to identify and care for the unique needs of Veterans and their families is imperative and this partnership has allowed that to happen.

What are the issues that will facilitate or impede the development of the partnership?

This unique partnership is facilitating the close work of both parties through monthly Leadership meetings, quarterly "All Staff" meetings and Advisory Committee meetings. Each partner's commitment to dedicating the necessary time involved with overseeing these program has been paramount to our successes. As our new partnership programs have come onboard (MHNP Residency and VANAP-Graduate Education Program), an additional monthly meeting has been added to review plans and progress of these initiatives.

What is the time commitment for the partners?

Both partners provide protected time to enable faculty to carry out the functions of the program effectively and efficiently. This includes relieving faculty of other administrative, clinical, or academic responsibilities, where necessary, and monthly planning meetings. There will also be an annual strategic planning meeting of key leadership and stakeholders to review successes, identify barriers, and plan for future years. Program leadership will ensure that strategic planning and assessment is aligned with local and national nursing education and practice goals and objectives. Annual reports will be provided to the VA Office of Academic Affiliations to be approved in advance of submission by both the Nurse Executive and the Dean of the UAB SON.

Whose time will be required?

There is some time required of executive leadership from each partner (at least monthly), with the majority of administrative time being spent by UABSON and BVAMC faculty. The VANAP Leadership Team meets monthly, alternating between meetings at the UABSON and BVAMC. All members are actively engaged and have agreed to the time requirements necessary to grow and sustain the partnership.

When will the meetings be scheduled?

Monthly VANAP Leadership Team meetings are held that include the UABSON Dean, BVAMC CNO, program co-directors, BVAMC Chief of Patient Care Services and UABSON Associate Dean for Clinical and Global Partnerships. As the partnerships have grown, the BVAMC Associate Chief of Staff for Education and Chief of Mental Health have joined as have the co-directors of the MHNP Residency and VANAP-Graduate Education Program. These meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month and alternate between the UABSON and BVAMC. The meetings are used for planning and to review successes, identify barriers, and plan for sustainability.

ENVIRONMENT

Space

What space is required for the activity?

The BVAMC has excellent facilities available to educate students. A 313-bed acute tertiary care facility located within Birmingham's health sciences and medical center district, the BVAMC provides acute tertiary medical and surgical care to Veterans of Alabama and surrounding states. Recent construction provides patients with access to state-of-the-art facilities and equipment in all clinical programs. The BVAMC also includes a Mental Health Clinic and Community Based Outpatient Clinics. The UABSON provides office space within the School of Nursing building for VA co-directors of all three partnership initiatives, including VANAP, the MHNP Residency and the VANAP-Graduate Education program.

What equipment and supplies are needed?

The BVAMC uses a Computerized Patient Record System (a specific genre of Electronic Medical Records) that students must be familiarized with. The UABSON acquired this system for its simulation lab to allow students to learn the program's specifics in a safe, controlled environment.

What money is needed?

The original VA Nursing Academy (VANAP) partnership was supported by the Veterans Health Administration Office of Academic Affiliations and included support for 10 FTEs between the UABSON and BVAMC. This was reduced to 5 FTEs midway through the program and as of October 2014, the partnership became completely sustained via a Memorandum of Understanding between the UABSON and BVAMC and shared support of 3 FTEs (1.5 FTE from each partner). Currently, each partner also contributes a .5 FTE co-director for the MHNP Residency. The VANAP-GE program, through funding from the VHA Office of Academic Affiliations, currently supports faculty positions for both partners.

Where are we meeting?

Meetings are alternated monthly between the UABSON and the BVAMC.

Where will we present outcomes?

VANAP faculty have been actively engaged in joint scholarly work since the initial partnership began in 2009. To date, partners have disseminated 40 publications in peer-reviewed nursing and health related journals and provided 80 professional presentations. Internally, outcomes are presented via news stories on websites and in annual reports developed by both parties.

ENVIRONMENT

Regulation

What are the policies or regulatory issues that will impede or facilitate development of the partnership on both sides?

This partnership must abide by VA and state university system regulations. Our shared vision allows us to work through the infrastructure issues existing at the state academic level and the federal arena.

Context

How will the partnership be funded?

The original VA Nursing Academy partnership was initiated with a commitment to a sustainability plan and a desire to create resources targeted at continuing the relationship. Funding drove the depth and breadth of the partnership and its related outcomes early on. While each partner's executive leaders invested resources to support the initiative, extramural federal funding for the VA Nursing Academy provided the resources needed to produce the significant vertical and horizontal integration of the initiative across both organizations that lead to the value-added outcomes associated with this initiative. Because of the success and importance of the program and partnership, the UABSON and BVAMC agreed to sustain the partnership with internal resources once VA funding ceased as of September 30, 2014. Notably, the UABSON Board of Visitors also established an Endowed VA scholarship in 2011, funded at more than \$140,000 that supports undergraduate students with expressed commitments to VA health care nursing. Additionally, the UABSON matches up to three Jonas doctoral Veterans Scholarships annually (\$30,000 per year) for VANAP faculty and VA employed Nursing students.

What are the constraints of both partners?

As previously mentioned, this unique partnership necessitates the close work of both parties through monthly meetings and regular interim communication. Reports of partnership activities are regularly required by the VHA and there are also monthly conference calls with the VHA Office of Academic Affiliations. Each partner's commitment to dedicating the necessary time involved with overseeing these programs has been paramount to our successes; however, the time involved by busy administrators, faculty and staff can also be considered a constraint at times.

What history do the partners have with each other and each others' institutions?

The UABSON and the BVAMC had a 40-year history of educational collaboration with student training prior to formalizing our academic-practice partnership in 2009. BVAMC nurses have been preceptors for many years for both BSN and MSN students and are hired consistently each semester as part-time faculty to supervise groups of clinical students for direct care experience in both undergraduate nursing foundations and advanced adult health courses. Since 2009, when we partnered more significantly and collaboratively through establishing the VA Nursing Academy, our relationship has become intimately interwoven and grown with the onboarding of each new partnership program.

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