

DEVELOPING MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS FOR EXPERT NURSING PROFILES: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STAKEHOLDERS PERSPECTIVES AND THE EVIDENCE?

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Background

Due to the complexity of cancer care, there is an increased need for expert nurses involved in the care of cancer patients. Although the added value of these expert nursing profiles, such as advanced practice (APN) and specialized nurses (SN) in interprofessional teams has already been proven, barriers and facilitators at individual, organizational and healthcare system level, related to their role integration have been reported. To date, little research has been conducted on the needs of these expert nurses and the needs of the interprofessional team and the nurse managers who they collaborate with, regarding role integration. No comprehensive overview is available on the effectiveness (e.g. on role and leadership development, collaboration, role clarity, job satisfaction and job retention) and components of mentoring programs that aimed at supporting the individual expert nurse, the interprofessional team, and the nurse/healthcare managers.

Aim(s)

To describe underlying processes, dynamics, experienced barriers and facilitators of expert nurses during their role integration in an interprofessional team. To identify, evaluate and summarize evidence about the objectives and characteristics of mentoring programs for expert nurses and to provide insights in the development of a mentoring program for expert nurses.

Methods

This study was performed in four phases. Firstly, a qualitative study was conducted in which individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with 51 expert nurses from 11 academic and non-academic hospitals in Belgium. Secondly, a qualitative study, in which 26 semi-structured interviews with nurse managers from two Belgian academic and four non-academic hospitals were conducted. Thirdly, a systematic review was performed. PubMed, EMBASE, CINAHL and The Cochrane Library were searched, and studies describing the characteristics of mentoring programs focusing on one or more specific roles of SN and APN were included. Fourthly, a matrix which was developed in collaboration with several key stakeholders (e.g. members of a steering committee, experts in educational sciences and mentoring, expert nurses, nurse managers). The content of the matrix is based on the results of the previous three phases and reflects the needs of the expert nurse, the interprofessional team and their nurse managers, as well as learning methods which can be applied to convey the content during a mentoring program.

Results

SN and APN experienced a lonely journey during role integration and were constantly searching for partners, medical knowledge and acknowledgement from the interprofessional team. Despite having a watchful attitude and trying to make themselves visible to ensure they were involved in the team and to preserve their role and responsibilities, they felt powerless when they had the impression that their role was not acknowledged by their team. An unclear role description to the interprofessional team, and a lack of coaching and guidance were influencing factors of the experience of the expert nurses. To optimize collaboration, nurse managers need an implementation framework providing (1) a clear and uniform job description and an unambiguous definition of all expert nursing roles, (2) uniformity about the need for coaching and the level of autonomy of these expert nurses and (3) clarity on the financial aspects of integrating these expert nurses in healthcare teams. In the systematic review, twelve studies were included. All studies focused on mentorship programs for APN (nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists). Different forms of mentorship (formal, informal, workshadowing, competence development, workshops, reflection sessions) were reported. The studies reported positive outcomes on job retention (n=5), job satisfaction (n=6), skills improvement (n=7), satisfaction with the program (n=7) and confidence improvement (n = 4) among participants of the mentoring programs.

Discussion

SN and APN in oncology experience difficulties to integrate their role in existing interprofessional teams. There is need for the development of a framework which clarifies the job description, coaching and the financial aspects for the implementation of these expert nurses, and to enhance the collaboration within the nursing workforce. In general, there is a lack of rigorous research on mentoring programs for SN and APN, not focusing

on building clinical capabilities within their specialty domain. There is a need to develop a mentoring program that focuses primarily on needs and challenges experienced by both SN and APN related to their role integration in an interprofessional team.

Implications and future perspectives

The synthesis of the evidence may be useful to organizations developing and implementing mentoring programs for expert nurses.