The Rainbow Connection: Collaborative Academic Partnerships in Oncology Nursing Designed to Recruit and Retain Graduate Nurses

Michelle Kopp1, MSN, RN, AOCNS, NE-BC, Roxann Conrad1, MSN, RN, OCN, Pamela Meinert2, PhD, FNP-BC, RN-BC, Melissa Snyder3, D. Ed., FNP-BC, Belinda Frazee1, MSN, RN, OCN

Penn State Hershey Cancer Institute1, Penn State Hershey Medical Center Nursing Education and Professional Development2, Penn State College of Nursing3

Introduction
Oncology is a specialty within medical surgical nursing. Generally, nursing students have minimal exposure to oncology care settings within their nursing program. Hiring nurses who have a passion for oncology based on experience or perception of the oncology nurse role is difficult and can lead to nurse turnover.

Methods
A collaborative academic partnership between the Penn State College of Nursing and the Penn State Hershey Medical Center created a precepted oncology capstone experience. This experience immersed students into the continuum of care for an oncology patient including inpatient care, outpatient follow-up, and infusion visits. The program engages students in oncology nursing as a specialty area to help them refine their nursing skills, develop their leadership ability, and prepare for the reality of nursing. Students spend 240 clinical hours with a nurse preceptor working side-by-side to care for patients in the inpatient setting and spent an additional 120 hours in the outpatient setting. Students also complete two clinical within oncology such as palliative care, radiation oncology, breast center, or dermatology. Their experience culminates with a clinical project pertinent to the patient population.

Interventions
Students rated their proficiency at the beginning and end of their clinical experience using a Self-Assessment Tool for Oncology Nurses. Clinical skill and comfort level are measured on a 1-4 scale, where 1 = no experience and 4 = highly experienced.

Self-Assessment Tool for Oncology Nurses

Those actively involved in the experience noted a positive impact of the capstone program.

“...A precepted oncology capstone experience was extremely beneficial for my transition into a nurse resident. Having the opportunity to experience this unique patient population provided me exposure to chemotherapy, biotherapy, and some of the nuances that come with caring for an oncology patient. I also developed relationships with staff that helped make my transition into the working world a smoother one…”

Sara Sones, BSN, RN - Nurse Resident

The following quote is from a capstone nurse preceptor.

“Having a capstone student was such a special experience- I felt honored to be affecting someone’s education. The relationship I built with my capstone student was lighthearted and fun, but we also cultivated a real sense of accomplishment. Watching my capstone student develop her individual nursing practice under my guidance reinvigorated my own practice, making work enjoyable on a new level for me.”

Stephanie Wachter, BSN, RN - Preceptor

Conclusions
Collaborative academic partnerships designed to provide in-depth clinical experience in a specialty area are valuable to all participants. In particular, our experience demonstrated positive outcomes in recruitment and retention of graduate nurses who possess knowledge, skills, and attitudes for success in oncology nursing.

References