Recruitment and retention of nurse anesthesia faculty: Issues and strategies

Many factors have led to the current nursing and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) faculty shortage. These shortages need to be addressed with the development of strategies to attract high quality nurse anesthesia faculty and facilitate success in academic positions. As part of its strategic plan, the 2005-2006 AANA Education Committee addressed faculty recruitment and retention through an online survey of CRNA educators. Findings from that survey reinforced the need for the provision of additional resources for new CRNA faculty members.

The committee is planning a 1-day workshop for educators at the 2007 Assembly of School Faculty, in Orlando, Fla. Additional strategies to market the CRNA educator role, enhance faculty recruitment and retention, and provide resources to educators are discussed here. Strategies to prevent faculty burnout and promote faculty success include mentoring programs, renewal techniques, and organizational engagement. These efforts are in response to the aging faculty workforce and the increased demand for nurse anesthesia educators.

Key words: Faculty, recruitment, retention, workforce.

The current and future nursing workforce shortage needs to be addressed urgently. A nursing faculty shortage compounds this issue. These issues have a direct impact on the supply of nurses available for nurse anesthesia education. Furthermore, nurse anesthesia practitioners and educators are in high demand. Development of strategies to foster nurse anesthesia faculty recruitment and retention are high priorities for the AANA Education Committee.

In years past, the nursing shortage was attributable to decreased enrollment. Now, many schools of nursing find themselves overwhelmed with qualified applicants but have too few qualified nursing faculty to teach students seeking to enter this much-needed workforce.1

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, US nursing schools turned away 41,683 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2005 because of an inadequate supply of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, clinical preceptors, and budget constraints.2

Faculty shortage factors
One of the many factors that have contributed to the faculty shortage includes the aging of the present nursing faculty and an inadequate pool of younger faculty. According to the 2004 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses, the average age of faculty nurses was 46.8 years, and the average age of doctorally prepared nursing faculty was 55.7 years. The 50- to 54-year-old demographic represented the largest cohort of 21.4% of nursing faculty.3 Many advocate stimulating present faculty who are not doctorally prepared with tuition remission or time off for class attendance to attain doctoral degrees. Although these ideas are steps in the right direction, it should be noted that the numbers of total faculty will not increase if the current faculty who are master's prepared complete to a terminal degree.1

Another factor that contributes to the nursing and nurse anesthesia faculty shortage is a lack of emphasis on teaching educational principles in the rigorous didactic, clinical, and research curricula of most master's and doctoral programs. The preparation of a good clinician does not necessarily ensure a good educator. “Becoming a nurse educator is not an additive process; that is, it is not a matter of adding the role of educator to that of the nurse. Being an educator requires a change in knowledge, skills, behaviors, and values to prepare for the new assimilated roles, settings, and goals shared by new reference groups.”4(p94)

The demand for postsecondary teachers is projected to grow because of the following factors: the population of 18 to 24 year olds is increasing, a larger proportion of high school graduates is expected to attend college, and more adults may return to college to enhance their career prospects or update their skills. The demand for postsecondary teachers will increase by 32.2% by the year 2014, according
to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The need for registered nurses will increase by 29.4% in that same time frame. The additive demand for these 2 professional groups is immense.

Providing education is ostensibly the reason most universities and colleges exist, but generation of new knowledge through original research is another key aspect of most institutional missions. The successful acquisition of extramural funding is essential for tenure-track faculty. Many faculty members are under immense pressure to develop programs of research and focus a great deal of their attention to this goal rather than education. Tenure-track faculty are evaluated and rewarded with salary increases and tenure, not necessarily by their skill at teaching but rather the amount of funded research they have generated. On the other hand, because of the shortage of doctorally prepared nurses in education, some nurse scientists are asked to also fulfill teaching assignments in addition to managing their program of research.

The cycle of ineffective and diluted role expectations among nursing faculty has added tremendous role-related stress. It has been suggested that faculty retention and productivity could be optimized if early career success and work satisfaction were attainable. For new faculty members, the desire to be successful in all facets of academe, such as teaching, research and service, has become more and more difficult to achieve.

In one study, overwhelming workload and unfamiliarity with the university culture were identified as major stressors by new nursing faculty members. A stressor that has been reported by numerous junior nursing faculty is lack of peer support. Many novice faculty receive generalized support but very little, if any, definitive help with role development in teaching and scholarship. Other identified stressors for nursing faculty include the expectation to stay abreast of emerging technology in their respective clinical specialty areas and to adapt their teaching styles to reflect current instructional technology. Faculty stress and burnout is unfortunately not a new concept to most in education. Based on the literature, individuals in the caring professions, such as teachers, nurses, and social workers, are at a higher risk for job-related burnout.

In some academic units, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) program administrators are also expected to teach, maintain a clinical practice, and have a program of funded research. Achieving a realistic balance among these components is a major challenge.

With so many stressors affecting faculty satisfaction and performance, a call to investigate faculty development issues has become evident to administrators and deans at many nursing schools. Critical issues that face schools were elucidated in an American Association of Colleges of Nursing 2005 Survey on Faculty Vacancies, which yielded a 69.7% response rate. Research findings from this study demonstrated recurring themes including lack of competitive salaries relative to the clinical sector, a limited pool of doctorally prepared faculty, finding the faculty with the right specialty mix, lack of qualified applicants, high faculty workload, finding faculty willing and able to teach clinical courses, and finding faculty willing and able to conduct research. These findings leave many school administrators and deans with decisions to make concerning the need to create avenues of scholarship that are diverse, individualized, and well rounded with the organizational strategic goals in mind.

**Faculty retention and recruitment survey**

As part of its strategic plan, the AANA Education Committee is addressing the recruitment and retention of nurse anesthesia faculty. Nurse anesthesia program administrators turn over at a rate of approximately 15% to 20% annually (Francis Gerbasi, CRNA, PhD, AANA director of Accreditation and Education, oral communication). These leadership changes, coupled with faculty vacancies in nurse anesthesia programs, led to the development of this aspect of the strategic plan, which includes the elements of faculty, financial, administrative, and political and perception concerns.

A web-supported survey on CRNA faculty recruitment and retention was conducted by the Education Committee in January 2006. A total of 208 faculty were emailed about the survey, and 139 (67%) responded (online, Survey Monkey). A 5-point Likert scale was used to evaluate survey items. Those who completed the survey ranked the need for faculty development workshops for faculty with 1 to 3 years experience with a mean score of 4.43. Development of workshops in the following areas was weighted as follows. All scores are mean rankings on a 5-point Likert scale:

- Innovative instruction, eg, distance learning, human patient simulation (4.04)
- Curriculum development (4.04)
- Negotiation skills (3.76)
- Leadership (3.63)
- Grant writing (3.36)

Potential topics for fellowships were ranked in the following manner:
Faculty fellowship program to assist in obtaining doctoral degrees (4.03)  
Financial support (3.71)  
Educational grants with corporate sponsorship (3.56)  
Shadowing a program director (3.35)

When asked to indicate which of the following items were high priorities for CRNA faculty recruitment and retention, respondents ranked these choices as follows:

- Establish an annual salary survey for CRNA educators (46%).
- Develop a general resource tool to help orient new faculty to their role, available online and in hard copy (46%).
- Work to simplify/revise the Medicare teaching rules (41%).
- Continue to provide the cost/benefit workbook as a resource (38%).
- Develop distance learning opportunities for CRNA faculty using technology and the AANA Learning Center (37%).
- Development of strategies for faculty workforce study data will be used to inform decisions about faculty recruitment and retention.

Another area investigated in this survey was that of networking with academic deans. Mean rankings on the 5-point Likert scale were as follows for these 2 items:

- Continuation of the Dean’s luncheon at the Assembly of School Faculty (3.44)
- Workshop for the Deans at the Assembly of School Faculty (3.42)

Some respondents felt that development of strategies for faculty interested in obtaining advanced degrees should be implemented. Providing information packets of advanced degrees received a mean ranking of 3.88, while email alerts regarding doctoral education had a mean rank of 3.78.

Marketing the CRNA educator role was a high priority for 52% of respondents. Development of a campaign to encourage CRNAs to become educators using the following strategies was recommended, with mean rankings listed for each item:

- Advertisements in association newsletters (4.25)
- Advertisements in professional journals (4.07)
- Newspaper classified advertisements (2.91)
- Television commercials or public service announcements (2.87)
- Radio commercials or public service announcements (2.73)

### Strategies for faculty development

Based on the data and the Education Committee strategic plan, the following strategies will be implemented:

- A faculty development workshop targeted to CRNA faculty will be held on February 21, 2007, at the Assembly of School Faculty in Orlando, Fla. The following topics will be discussed: leadership, curriculum design, clinical and didactic instruction, distance education, and instructional technology.
- A campaign to promote CRNA education careers is underway. Print advertisements will appear in journals, newsletters and brochures. AANA will continue to exhibit at nursing and allied health meetings, with information available on CRNA faculty opportunities available.
- A Minority Recruitment Forum has been approved and funded by the AANA Board of Directors. This networking opportunity fosters increasing racial and ethnic diversity among CRNA faculty.
- The AANA Foundation Faculty Workforce Study data will determine trends in faculty compensation, along with supply and demand projections.
- There are additional strategies that will be implemented as prioritized by the AANA Board of Directors, Education Committee, and staff.

### Discussion

Faculty development has long been discussed among nursing educators. Few faculty development programs appear to effectively deal with the issues and problems facing nursing faculty today. Cultivating scholarly growth is a fundamental hallmark of academic life. Although tenure and promotions are important faculty goals, professional development should not always be linked to these goals.

Many in nursing education agree that scholarly development and role satisfaction have higher success rates when a faculty member has been in a mentoring relationship. Mentoring offers faculty an understanding of the organizational culture and socialization of faculty to their roles in various academic settings. Both formal and informal mentor relationships with senior faculty, other new faculty members, and department chairs have a great impact on the future job satisfaction of new faculty. Some nursing schools and programs of nurse anesthesia have in the past incorporated an Educators’ Institute to promote the socialization of the professional role and a mentoring relationship among novice and experienced program directors. Successful mentoring is not achieved without the acknowledgment of increased faculty workload. The support of administration would be needed in the form of “time buyout” to mentor new faculty effectively and therefore would enhance the process.

Some universities have cultivated centers for teaching and
research. These centers provide key elements that incorporate the tripartite mission of most universities—teaching, research, and service. Faculty receive education and support opportunities for curriculum development, instructional techniques, and how to incorporate technology into their courses. Many of these types of centers have been funded with grant monies that can facilitate the programs continuance with shrinking budgets in schools and colleges of nursing.

Scholarship has many forms within the confines of nursing. Faculty practice is a form of scholarship. Faculty practice is an integral part of the faculty role by maintaining expert clinical skills that is a part of professional development. Professional development programs should include faculty practice to help balance the scholarship paradigm. A successful program would include a needs assessment of the new faculty and scholarly professional plan development program with mentors and administrators. Newer research identifies that a relationship between full engagement and burnout suggests individuals may sanction heavier workloads if they perceive their work as valued, well-rewarded, if they were treated fairly, and if the community in which they worked maintained a supportive energy.

Conclusion

Diverse strategies have been employed by nursing and nurse anesthesia programs to recruit and retain faculty. The unification of practice and education may appeal to many CRNA educators. The feasibility of successfully incorporating the roles of program administrator, teacher, practitioner, and researcher depends on clear communication and shared values among the stakeholders in nurse anesthesia education.

The AANA Education Committee and staff will continue to closely monitor trends in nursing and the nurse anesthesia faculty workforce and amend the strategic plan accordingly. While role demands for educators are challenging, the potential rewards are immense. The future of our specialty depends on a dedicated cadre of CRNA educators.

REFERENCES


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