FINAL REPORT

A Model of Excellence for Community-Based Teaching and Research to Improve the Health of Older Adults

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Introduction

The purpose of this project was to establish a long-term collaborative partnership with Presbyterian Homes and Services (PHS) to improve the health and health care delivery of older adults receiving home and community-based services. Specifically, goals of this partnership were to develop community-based learning experiences for prelicensure and graduate nursing education; and to develop a research protocol for studying nursing care issues such as urinary incontinence, fall prevention, cognitive impairment, or care transitions.

During the course of the project, we held a retreat with the PHS staff on September 22, 2011, where we were able to mutually define key elements of our mission, vision, and objectives for our collaborative partnership. We also identified an organizational structure, along with preferred communication mechanisms between our two organizations. Two workgroups were developed with team members from both our Adult and Gerontological Health (AGH) Cooperative and PHS staff: an education work group and a research work group. The education work group mutually designed an undergraduate senior practicum experience, and identified at least one project for a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) student for their scholarly paper. We initiated one faculty-initiated research project on testing the feasibility of a multicomponent intervention to prevent toileting disability in older women who reside in one of the assisted living facilities owned by PHS. PHS staff provided significant input into the design of the recruitment strategies, and their exercise therapist is participating as the interventionist. We have had difficulty finalizing plans with the second PHS assisted living facility targeted to test the feasibility of the intervention. Three students are engaged in this research project (two undergraduates and one DNP student). One of the undergraduate students recently had a UROP project funded that will use data from this study.

As part of our efforts to increase faculty awareness of community-engagement research strategies, we were successful in recommending to the School’s Research Committee that the theme of our Annual Research Day should be on community-engaged research. The conference on Transforming Health through Community-Engaged Research and Practice was held on April 27, 2012. A nationally recognized expert in health promotion and health disparities research and practice, Dr. Antonia Villarruel, Professor and Nola J. Pender Collegiate Chair and Associate Dean for Research and Global Affairs, presented on Engaging Communities in Research: From Efficacy to Scale Up. She also provided consultation to several faculty members on their research projects and/or ideas.

We had some limited success with increasing student opportunities for sharing their engaged learning and research experiences. One prelicensure student presented on her research at our School’s Annual Research Day during the Center of Gerontological Nursing’s breakout session. It was the first time a prelicensure student has given an oral research presentation at this event. Two other formal prelicensure students attended the Careers in Aging Event that we hosted and discussed their experiences as a Emerging Geriatric Nursing Scientist awardees as well as their current gerontological staff nursing position. The Emerging Geriatric Nursing Scientist program is a mentored research experience in which the student is paired with a faculty member on a geriatric nursing project, and has the opportunity to attend a regional nursing research conference.
Key Lessons Learned in Institutionalizing Community Engagement within Department

The timing of this project was significant with respect to the undergraduate and DNP curriculum revisions which required that we seek greater opportunities for community engagement. Because of the need for student learning experiences at all curricular levels that require greater cooperation and collaboration with health care organizations, we were able to learn strategies for how to better engage with our community partners in seeking these types of learning experiences for both undergraduate students as well our DNP students. Consequently, we have had multiple meetings with another long-term care organization to mutually identify projects that would be of interest for our students as well as faculty. One of these will involve two organizations (Ebenezer Housing and Services and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota), and are planning as a joint student, faculty, and organization research opportunity to improve health care delivery services. We have also held a number of other meetings with large nurse practitioner provider groups to identify DNP project opportunities that would meet the needs of the health care system, and are working with a state project, Prepare Minnesota for Alzheimer’s 2020, to develop other DNP student projects.

In addition to working directly with more community partners to identify their needs and how we could better engage with them in student learning experiences, we held our first invitational meeting with all of our course preceptors. We received excellent suggestions for what they would like from us such as adding their photos, names, and biographical sketches to our Cooperative’s website as well as hosting more frequent meetings.

Next Steps

We did not complete the work that we had planned with PHS. We will hosting meetings with them over the summer and fall to work on a memorandum of understanding for our collaborative partnership, and to better define the needs of both organizations and how to implement a plan for meeting them. Once this is completed, our plan is to host a special event to celebrate the inauguration of this partnership.

Now that both our new undergraduate and DNP curricula are fully implemented, we will be better able to identify opportunities within their course offerings that would benefit from a community-engaged learning or research experience.

We are planning to establish an Advisory Committee for our Adult and Gerontological Health Nurse Practitioner DNP Program. Several people have agreed to serve on this committee; however, we have been waiting to hold our first meeting until after our first class graduated (all courses offered once) which occurred this Spring, and we hire a DNP Coordinator which should be this fall semester.

We will also be initiating a mutually agreed upon service-learning and research project that our students and faculty can work on together at Ebenezer Housing and Services next year. Based upon some of unspent funding, we will be working with the Community-Engaged Scholar Program to develop a gerontological nursing track.
Recommendations for the Engaged Department Program

This was an outstanding program which gave our team much greater awareness of community-engagement strategies, and the ideas for how to increase these within our own department. The frequency of meetings was helpful to keep the teams on track. We appreciated the opportunity to meet faculty from other departments and learn about their work and approaches for community-engaged work as it helped give us ideas. It was often surprising to hear how disparate disciplines could learn from each other about these types of strategies. It would be helpful to have resource materials on community-engaged teaching strategies in the health sciences available on the Moodle site. We would also recommend that there be a speaker, perhaps a national speaker in this area, who could work with the health science schools to better understand how to implement these methods into courses. We have been struggling to identify if what we do in our day-to-day teaching is the same as community-engaged learning or not. We do believe we have identified some new strategies but it would be helpful if there were some resources available to us.

Other Issues or Observations

Our progress was slower than planned this year for several reasons: 1) unanticipated work demands on the Team Leader this year; 2) competing priorities of the team members; 3) several retirements or resignations, including our student member taking a family leave from the program; and 4) course development for the new undergraduate and graduate curricula. There were several changes in our School that affected our opportunity to host seminars on community-based teaching strategies. In addition, the learning experiences that we had initially identified with PHS were not able to be implemented this past year because of lack of undergraduate student interest in a long-term care practicum, and because of the family leave of our DNP student team member. We believe the difficulty implementing the research protocol in the second assisted living facility may be related to the administrator’s views related to possible stigma that residents may experience if they are identified as study participants because of the topic.

Our plans have always called for being engaged with this project for the long-term, as a collaborative, long-term partnership takes time to establish, nurture, and sustain. This meets an important departmental goal and need for both our students and faculty.