



Mentoring New Members in Professional Nursing Organizations for Membership Retention

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Abstract

Purpose: A lack of engaged, participating members of professional nursing organizations limits the overall impact that an organization could make on healthcare delivery, nurse leader development, nursing practice, and nursing scholarship. Mentoring can positively influence membership retention by fostering new member engagement and inclusion. This article discusses the benefits of mentoring new members of professional organizations within their first year of membership.

Methods: Active, volunteer members of a local chapter of a professional nursing organization mentored new members within their first year of membership for 3-6 months. Mentors recorded the number and method of interactions with the mentee on a tracking tool. After four months of mentoring, data from a post-survey evaluated the new member's engagement, inclusion, and likelihood of membership renewal.

Findings: Mentors interacted with their mentees 1-3 times per month. After four months of mentoring, 60% of mentees were very likely to renew their membership in the organization, and none were unlikely to renew. Mentees engaged with the organization through mentoring and reading the chapter newsletter (80%), reported feeling included in organization activities (100%), and found personal contacts from their mentor meaningful (60%).

Conclusion: Mentoring is a strategy to positively promote new member engagement, inclusion, and the likelihood of membership renewal in a professional nursing organization. New members benefit from a mentoring program that shares organizational benefits and opportunities for participation. A volunteer-based mentoring program is sustainable and adaptable to other professional organizations seeking to improve membership retention, engagement, and inclusion.

Keywords: Professional Organization, Membership, Engagement, Inclusion, Renew, Mentoring.

Introduction

Professional nursing organizations (PNOs) are vital to nursing [1, 2]. PNOs promote the perspective of nursing into policy issues, guidelines, professional standards, and decision-making to create

conditions for nursing care of the highest quality and enhance the public image of the nursing profession [3]. Membership in a PNO benefits individuals and strengthens practice and leadership skills. For example, many PNOs offer members professional credentials demonstrating specialization in various nursing capacities, broadening their knowledge of nursing issues [4]. When membership declines, organizations become less effective. Therefore, retaining PNO membership is essential to sustain the organization's mission for the nursing profession [3-6].

Professional Nursing Organizations and Leadership

There is a critical need for active member engagement in PNOs to shape the future of nursing and develop nursing leaders to improve healthcare everywhere [1, 2]. Active, engaged members create and disseminate new knowledge, implement evidence-based practice changes, and advocate for effective health care policies [7]. Importantly, nurses gain readiness to assume leadership roles through participation in organization governance and leadership development programs, empowering members with leadership skills to influence policies, practice standards, and healthcare delivery across practice settings and disciplines [5, 7, 8]. Without active member participation, the overall impact of PNOs at local and national levels is limited. The challenge facing many PNOs is maintaining membership engagement and retention that enables the organization to grow or at least not decline [7].

Membership Retention

Professional organizations may experience a decline in membership renewal due to barriers such as a perception of poor value, lack of information about the organization, and lack of participation [9]. Literature on membership retention strategies within PNOs was limited. However, other health professional organizations indicate that early engagement and mentoring influences member commitment and retention [10, 11]. Mentoring provides elements of empowerment, such as information, support, resources, and collaboration, that positively correlate with organizational commitment [12]. Further, mentoring provides networking and relationship development that influences member satisfaction and retention [10, 13, 14].

Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing (STTI)

is a professional nursing organization with more than 100,000 active members and 600 individual chapters worldwide that support the organization's mission and vision [15]. An analysis of an individual chapter's new member process revealed gaps in connecting with new members early and often to promote engagement. This quality improvement project aimed to use mentoring to connect with new members in a PNO to improve member engagement, inclusion, and retention.

Methods

The Weber State University Institutional Review Board approved the quality improvement project. Full names did not appear on the project tools to protect the identity of new members. The post-survey included a permission statement to obtain consent for survey participation and informed participants that responses were anonymous and confidential.

New members (n = 11) inducted to a chapter of a PNO in March 2022 were identified for mentoring by the chapter's membership committee. Active chapter members (n=5) volunteered to mentor the new member mentees for 3-6 months. The membership committee assigned mentors to mentees with a ratio ranging from 1:1 to 1:5. Mentors watched a training video to orient them to the mentoring role and were provided with a Mentor Interaction Guide, a tool adapted from STTI's membership engagement and retention resources [16], that instructs mentors on what to anticipate from a new member, what to do or say during the member's first three months of membership, and how to promote the new member's engagement and inclusion with the chapter. Mentors were instructed to interact

with their mentee at least once per month and record the date and method of interaction (i.e., in person, phone, email, social media) on a tracking tool. The chapter's membership committee notified mentors of upcoming chapter events, activities, and opportunities to convey to mentees. After four months of mentoring, mentees received a Qualtrics survey for data collection on engagement, inclusion, and the likelihood of renewing membership.

Results

The mentoring program evaluation period ran from October 2022 through January 2023. The post-survey was open for six weeks to gather responses. Quantitative data were analyzed using Crosstab iQ and Text iQ. The chapter membership committee reviewed the tracking tool for frequency and method of interaction between the mentor and mentee.

The post-survey response rate was 45%. Responses (n = 5) from new member mentees indicated that personal contact with a mentor is meaningful (60%) and having a mentor close to home or work is very beneficial (60%). New members feel included or strongly included in organization activities (100%) and are very likely to renew their membership next year (60%) (See Figure 1 and Table 1). Additionally, new members value their membership for continuing nursing education opportunities (40%), an essential addition to a resume (40%), access to journals (40%), and community service opportunities (40%). Professional networking was the least selected variable (20%). Mentees received 1 to 3 monthly interactions from their mentor. Email was the only communication method used by the mentor to initiate an interaction.



Figure 1: New member's response on likelihood of renewing membership

Variable		%
Personal contacts from my mentor are meaningful to me.	The contacts from my mentor do not matter to me	0.0
	The contacts are not meaningful	0.0
	The contacts are somewhat meaningful	20.0
	The contacts are meaningful	60.0
	The contacts are very meaningful	20.0
A mentor close to my home or work location benefits me.	The location does not matter to me	0.0
	The location is not beneficial	0.0
	The location is somewhat beneficial	0.0
	The location is beneficial	40.0
	The location is very beneficial	60.0

Table 1. to be cont...

I feel included in the chapter activities	Feeling included does not matter to me	0.0
	I do not feel included	0.0
	I feel somewhat included	0.0
	I feel included	80.0
	I feel strongly included	20.0
I have visited the chapter website, Facebook, or Instagram page within the last 3 months.	Yes	20.0
	No	60.0
I have read a chapter newsletter within the last 3 months.	Yes	80.0
	No	0.0
What chapter events interest you most? (Select all that apply)	Networking or social events	0.0
	Community service events	60.0
	Professional or leadership development events	0.0
	Humanitarian or fundraising events	60.0
	Educational or research events	40.0
What do you value about your membership? (Select all that apply)	Honor and recognition of my accomplishments	0.0
	Professional networking	20.0
	An important addition to my resume	40.0
	Access to journals and nursing trends	40.0
	Continuing nursing education opportunities	40.0
	Community service opportunities	40.0
	Volunteer opportunities	0.0
	Scholarship opportunities	0.0
How likely are you to renew your membership next year?	I will not renew my membership	0.0
	Unlikely to renew	0.0
	Somewhat likely to renew	20.0
	Very likely to renew	60.0

Table 1: Member Survey Data

Discussion

Many professional organizations need help to maintain membership participation and retention. Outcomes from the mentoring program indicate that mentoring is a strategy PNO's can use to positively influence new member engagement, and the likelihood of renewing membership. Mentoring is a low-cost, volunteer-based intervention that can be applied in national and international PNOs to close gaps in membership sustainability, supporting nursing leadership growth.

Notably, several outcomes from this project correlate with existing knowledge from literature about the benefits of mentoring. In a PNO, mentoring benefits both the new member and the organization. New members who received monthly contacts from their mentor felt included in activities and communications, allowing them to find value in how the organization may benefit them. Further, new members gain opportunities to get involved in events and activities and are encouraged to read a newsletter or visit the PNO's website or social media page. Uniquely, the chapter membership committee partnered the new member with a mentor close to their home or work location, which the new member found beneficial and meaningful. Finally, the organization benefits from having a mentoring program for new members that strengthens the routine membership process, promoting active and engaged members of the PNO to serve in future leadership positions.

This project offers opportunities for future scholarship on member retention in PNOs. For example, gaining qualitative data from the

mentors on the mentoring process would be beneficial. Additionally, measuring the impact of a 12-month mentoring relationship on the likelihood of membership renewal in a PNO would contribute to knowledge for membership sustainment initiatives.

Conclusion

PNOs provide a platform for mentoring programs designed to improve the engagement and inclusion of new members. New members, nurtured and assisted in developing relationships and participating in organizational activities, will likely renew their membership. Mentoring fosters the perception of belonging, further promoting membership retention. PNOs can continue developing future nursing leaders by implementing a mentoring program to connect early and often with new members recently joining the organization.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no personal, commercial, political, academic, or financial conflicts of interest related to the content of this submission.

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