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Developing our future leaders: the role of a global mentoring programme

Mentorship has long been valued by the nursing profession as an approach to supporting students to achieve their potential in practice (Thompson et al 2017). Even more importantly, mentorship has a key role in supporting qualified nurses to realise their potential and give them the confidence to grow, particularly in their leadership. In Canada, Stubbs et al (2016) recognised this in the medical educator role, particularly in their professional portfolio as clinician, educator, leader and scholar. A portfolio quite similar to the qualified nurse. In their review of the research on medical academic mentorship, Strauss and Sackett's (2014) found that those who have been mentored reported greater career satisfaction, are more productive, are promoted more quickly and are more likely to stay at their institutions. My own experience reinforces the importance of the mentoring role as one of empowerment, offering the individual to be supported to create opportunities for excellence and growth in their leadership.

So, it was with great delight that I was invited to pilot a Global Leadership Mentorship programme to mentor a nursing professor on the other side of the world, in Australia, as a member of the prestigious global nursing society, Sigma Theta Tau International, based in the USA. Given the focus of the society on leadership and scholarship for nursing practice, the pilot programme was an initiative by a number of society members from across the globe to enhance the opportunities to support global nursing leadership. The programme was highly successful and we can certainly learn some lessons from the experience. The initiative was worked out by a core team of 6 over the course of a year and presented their ideas at the biennial convention in 2013 in the USA (Buckner et al 2014) and the programme commenced soon after. Now, two years after its commencement with the second year involved in evaluating the process, we have collated our findings from across the globe and will be presenting at the next biennium in October 2017.

The process was very straight forward. In essence the mentees' aspirations dictated the objectives within their mentor/mentee relationship and the direction of the meetings. I met with my mentee monthly over the course of one year and collectively the mentors 'met' quarterly through teleconference as did the mentees to support each other. The experience for me, was outstanding. As mentor, I learned a lot about my own leadership as well as supporting my colleague to act and articulate hers. My mentee presented me with an agenda prior to each meeting and wrote up the outcomes of the meeting afterwards and evaluated the relationship enthusiastically after the year. In total, the pilot involved eleven strategic nurse leaders from across the globe, mentoring an aspiring nurse leader or an early career leader in a region distant from themselves. Some mentees sought support for their research development whilst others sought support for the leadership and management of challenging teams.

The results were overwhelmingly positive though there were a number of challenges. Taking time out to engage in the skype meetings was a challenge especially with such demanding schedules and at a time that was conducive for both parties. I met early in the morning with my mentee but for her it was later in the evening. Others found this more

challenging. Trying to understand the cultural differences across the continents was challenging for some as was the communication, given the different language issues. Being patient and accepting of each other was clearly an issue for many though it is clear that both partners learned from this. Finally, making a commitment to each other was one of the most important issues as the challenges for some were overwhelming where one of the partners did not feel the same commitment as the other. Overall, all partners gained something from the relationship and the mentees on the whole felt they achieved their objectives. They thought differently, they managed a better work-life balance, focused more on their research, developed their confidence in their leadership, stepped out of their comfort zone and collectively we are looking to publish so others can learn from our experience.

In conclusion, the collective experiences of each of the mentors and mentees offers us the opportunity for further leadership development. The collaboration has helped us understand the challenges that nurses have in other regions of the world and the characteristics of leadership in different contexts and roles. The programme has helped us understand the frustrations of aspiring and early career leaders in our profession and the hurdles that need to be overcome to allow them the freedom to excel. Being a part of this global family of nurse leaders is a privilege not least as it presents to us the chance to create opportunities, find our own solutions and find better ways to understand each other in the increasingly diverse world in which we live.

References

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