Developing a Career as a Nurse Educator

ABSTRACT
This column discusses developing and managing a career as a nurse educator.

As the nurse educator shortage is slowly being resolved with the addition of educator preparation courses, majors, and focus areas in many graduate nursing programs and by using creative strategies to develop clinically focused nurses as preceptors and clinical instructors, there is the potential for increasing the numbers of nurses seeking full-time positions as educators. Recruitment, retention, and advancement of these new colleagues will depend on employers and coworkers assisting them develop successful and satisfying careers. The next four Teaching Tips will offer “tips” for developing a career as a nurse educator.

A CAREER AS A NURSE EDUCATOR
A career is a long-term investment through which self-actualization and service occur (McBride, 1985). According to McBride, there are four stages of a career that evolve over time: preparation, competence, facilitating others, and becoming an advisor or mentor.

In the preparation stage, the nurse acquires the knowledge and experience for the role. For nurse educators, this involves educational preparation at graduate levels (master’s and doctoral degrees) and experience in classroom and clinical settings. As the body of knowledge required for this advanced practice role has evolved, several nursing organizations have developed standards and competencies that guide the preparation of nurse educators (Brundt & Aucoin, 2008; Halstead, 2007; Southern Regional Education Board, 2002).

Competence occurs as the nurse develops expertise. Nurse educators achieve competence by expanding their repertoire of teaching skills and working with a variety of learners. At this stage, the commitment to the educator role becomes solidified and the educator seeks continuing knowledge and skills to perfect the role; public recognition of competence occurs through certification.

At the next stage of a career, the role shifts from developing self to facilitating others. Here, the nurse educator may assume leadership roles as course leader, department chair, staff development coordinator, or dean and may engage in activities such as participating in strategic planning, empowering others to become competent, providing faculty development, or serving in leadership roles in professional organizations.

The last stage of the career occurs as the nurse shifts to a role as an advisor or mentor, and focuses on issues that will leave an enduring legacy. For nurse educators, this can involve developing the science of nursing education and assuring that structures for educator development are in place.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT
Advancing through the stages of career development occurs over time, and requires the nurse educator to continuously identify strengths and limitations, set goals, and find and use resources to attain goals (Rodts & Lamb, 2008). Donner and Wheeler (2001) have identified five steps to achieve career goals: environmental scanning, self-assessment, creation of a career vision, development of a strategic career plan, and marketing.

When conducting an environmental scan, nurse educators assess current trends in health care and nursing practice, note changes in the type and needs of their learners, and monitor changes in educational technology and pedagogy. Understanding these trends establishes the groundwork for assessing the educators’ own current knowledge and experience and using the information to seek additional preparation or learning opportunities. Establishing a career vision involves setting short-term and long-term goals. For example, nurse educators may seek advancement in academic rank, in teaching responsibilities (types of learners or types of content), in leadership and administrative responsibilities (chair of department, chair of key commit-
Developing and managing a career as a nurse educator is an intentional and ongoing activity. In subsequent columns, details of career management will be discussed, including choosing an academic appointment and seeking promotion, networking and peer review, developing a teaching portfolio, and choosing and using a mentor.

REFERENCES

Diane M. Billings, EdD, RN, FAAN
Chancellor’s Professor Emeritus
Indiana University School of Nursing
Indianapolis, Indiana