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Developing a Clinical Advancement Program for Nephrology Nurses

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Problem: Results from a national engagement survey provided information about nephrology nurse dissatisfaction with career progression, job security and training and development. Registered Nurses (RNs) requested for more opportunities in career advancement, improved performance management and promotions, the development of people to their full potential and for increased retention of the most experienced and competent nurses.

Problem Approach: Concerned with nurse survey dissatisfaction and turnover, a clinical advancement program specific to nephrology nursing, was developed and piloted with staff nurses working in outpatient, inpatient and home therapies within regions of 2 company divisions. Since the 1970's clinical advancement programs have proven to be effective tools for increasing nurse satisfaction, improving quality of care, and reducing nurse turnover. First steps included a nurse work environment assessment followed by regional focus groups with nephrology nurse educators and clinical managers to gain input on professional development interests. Two divisional teams were formed with positions in education, quality, human resources, operations and clinical specialty to provide oversight and guidance for the pilot program rollout and maintenance. Regional work groups assisted with the development of the program including a Program Manual, staff nurse job descriptions for the 5 levels of nursing, Clinical Manager Toolkit, Facilitator Guide, and a RN Orientation DVD. Regional education was provided to all involved in the Pilot program. Divisional teams met semi annually and quarterly conference calls were held with nurse educators and clinical managers to gain ongoing input on rollout process and program issues. Over a 2 1/2 year period two staff nurse online surveys were deployed and focus groups were conducted to gain insights on program satisfaction and to solicit nurse input for program improvements.

Conclusions: Nurse input from surveys and focus groups provided valuable insights into nurse professional development interests and informed program changes involving requirements, qualifications, nursing levels, recognition and rewards, relevance to job, and the programs ability to improve nurse practice and nurse-technician and nurse-patient relationships. A comparison of staff nurse retention data before the rollout of the program and after implementation revealed that nurse turnover improved by 11.8 % and 16.2% in the 2 Pilot divisions.

Implications: The professional development of nephrology staff nurses facilitates retention and satisfaction by rewarding nurses for developing Nephrology Nursing expertise. Based on the results of the pilot, business decisions were made to implement the clinical advancement program in all company divisions to promote retention and recognition of experience and growing RN performance.

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