

Incentives motivating mentors and criteria for selecting mentors in the pre-graduation traineeship of future registered nurses

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Modern education in the field of healthcare is faced with the challenge of coping with one of the most important tasks – to develop in students a set of competences which serve as a sound basis for mastering a series of job-specific knowledge, skills and abilities, and which constitute a guarantee for coping successfully with all everyday tasks. The attention of the mentor is focused on finding the most reasonable solution to the various situations that the trainee may find him/herself in, and ensuring emotional comfort.

AIM: To identify the grounds and criteria for selecting mentors for the pre-graduation traineeships of the future registered nurses.

MATERIAL AND METHODS: In order to determine the opinion of the mentors, we surveyed 106 mentors in several university hospitals: ‘St. Georgi’ University Hospital – Plovdiv, MPHAT AD – Haskovo, ‘Dr. At. Dafovski’ University Hospital – Kardzhali, University Hospital – Stara Zagora.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION: During the pre-graduation traineeship in a real-life environment, students have the opportunity to develop and consolidate a series of skills, competences and qualities which are an integral part of the modern image of the registered nurse. It is logical that the mentor should be the leading factor in the pre-graduation traineeship, yet the tutor has organizational and control functions.

CONCLUSION: Mentors are expected to ensure patient safety, as well to create suitable working conditions for students.

Key words: mentors, pre-graduation traineeship, trainee-nurses.

Introduction

The modern world is changing at an unprecedented rate. One of the areas with tangible dynamic transformations is medical education, which has to meet the growing current and future health needs of society. Most urgent among those needs are the processes of demographic ageing which have affected Bulgaria to an alarming extent. Life expectancy is increasing, and so is the proportion of elderly people. In this regard, the need of well-trained medical specialists is unquestionable [1].

On the other hand, new technologies have a strong impact on medical education. These new technologies affect every aspect of our lives and cause a fundamental change in the way students communicate, establish and maintain relationships, and study [2] [3] [4]. Lecturers and tutors are expected to make the processes of learning more interesting, challenging and thought-provoking [5]. This applies to both theoretical and practical training of medical specialists.

Modern education in the field of health care is faced with the challenge of coping with one of the most important tasks – the task to develop in students a set of competences which serve as a sound basis for mastering a series of job-specific knowledge, skills and abilities, and which constitute a guarantee for coping successfully with all everyday tasks. They are of vital importance as they include competences needed not only for the moment but also for the future. Improving and keeping up the qualifications of registered nurses means striving after improving the quality of their professional work by developing and realizing their potential as both personalities and professionals [6].

In this context, the professional competence of registered nurses is a necessary prerequisite for achieving higher quality healthcare and improving the health status of the population.

During their pre-graduation training, students work independently in the respective hospital ward without the presence of a tutor. Therefore, the traineeship has to be very well organized and controlled by the mentor, who should strictly and closely monitor, support and assess the independent work of the trainees.

The attention of the mentor is focused on finding sensible and efficient solutions to various situations the trainee may find him/herself in, as well as on ensuring emotional comfort.

According to the Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language, a mentor is a person who “tutors and monitors someone, and gives them advice „лице, and synonyms of ‘mentor’ are ‘teacher’, ‘educator’, ‘guide’ (Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language, 2004). In a broad sense, the mentor is a qualified specialist with sufficient experience in his/her work. The idea of mentorship is widely popular in vocational training in Western Europe, Russia and the USA.

Mentorship is a valuable and popular vocational training method. It is one of the oldest forms of mastering professional skills and enables the trainee to have confidence in his/her own skills, to develop the qualities and competences needed for their future or current profession [7].

Mentorship is a mechanism of sharing experience between two parties one of whom has a higher status on the basis of knowledge and skills in a certain area. The knowledgeable, competent, capable, established specialists pass on the professional and personal knowledge and skills they have acquired to the newcomers to the profession.

Bulgarian medical education also has traditions in the field of mentorship. Mentors are registered nurses with a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree in Healthcare Management, working in university hospitals and clinics. They have the required pedagogical training acquired in the respective courses and degrees, and they have also mastered specific knowledge and skills needed in the process of training [8]. These changes have brought forward mentors alongside tutors.

The international nursing standard defines 8 competences distinguishing the responsibilities of mentors:

1. Mentors are expected to facilitate the progress of the students towards achieving results.

2. Establish efficient working relationships.
3. Facilitate learning.
4. Assess and evaluate the student learning experience.
5. Create a suitable environment for learning.
6. Apply theory into practice, implement scientifically proven practices.
7. Assist in the identification and achievement of the learning objectives of the students.
8. Participation in the formation of an overall evaluation of the students trained in the conditions of clinical practice in order to guarantee the mastering of clinical competences [9].

In the training of Healthcare students, in addition to the necessary qualification and practical experience of the mentor, the latter's personal qualities and teaching skills also play a very important role.

S. Toncheva points out that "the mentor has to be included in the continuous training and improvement system of the healthcare establishment where the mentor works, so as to keep up his/her professional qualifications up-to-date and to develop his/her personal and professional competences" [10].

Objective: To identify and establish grounds and criteria for the selection of mentors during the pre-graduation traineeship of future registered nurses.

Material and methods:

In order to determine the opinion of the mentors, we surveyed 106 mentors in several university hospitals: 'St. Georgi' University Hospital – Plovdiv, MPHAT AD – Haskovo, 'Dr. At. Dafovski' University Hospital – Kardzhali, University Hospital – Stara Zagora.

Findings and Discussion:

The average age of the surveyed mentors is $41,88 \pm 1,04$ y., and their average work experience is $18,74 \pm 1,15$ y.

According to their position: 1% are head nurses, 16% are nurse managers, and 83% are ordinary registered nurses /Fig. 1/.

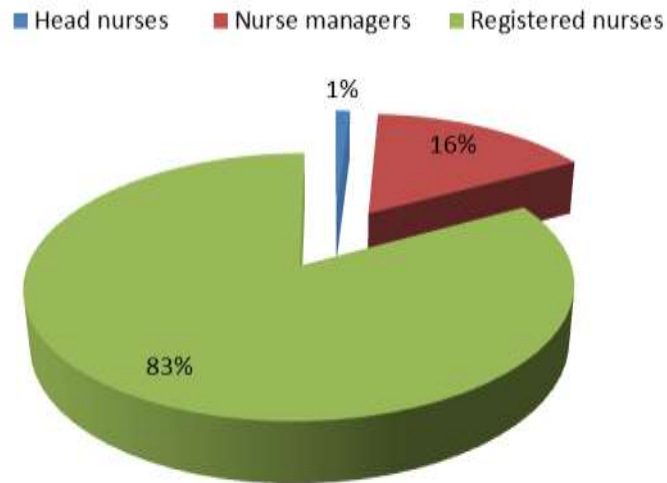


Figure 1: Distribution of the mentors according to position held

The distribution of the mentors according to their level of education is as follows: the highest percentage is that of the holders of Specialist’s degrees – 31.0%, followed by those with Bachelor’s degrees – 29.0%, with Master’s degrees in Healthcare Management - 27,0%, and Bachelor’s degrees in Healthcare management - 13,0% /Fig.2./

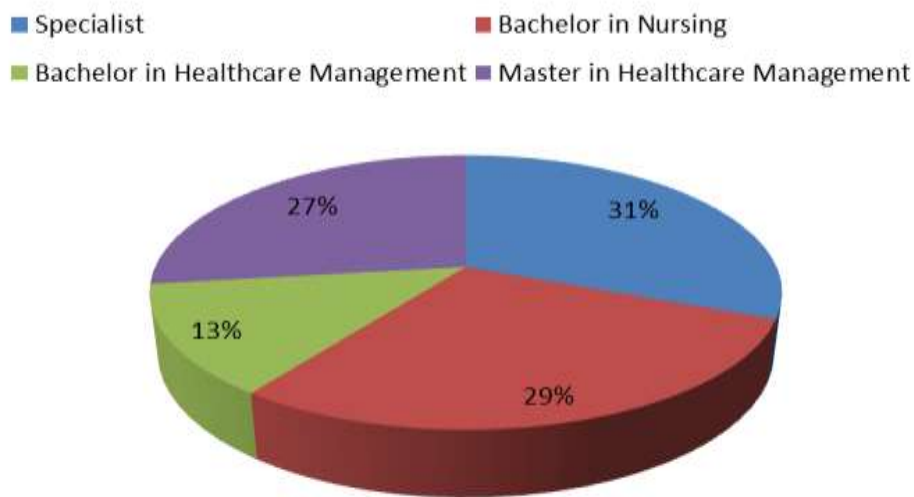


Figure 2: Distribution of the mentors according to their level of education

It is of note that only 40.0% of the mentors have Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees in Healthcare Management, and are therefore trained and qualified to conduct the practical training of students on the basis of their pedagogical qualifications and aptitude.

Over half of the participants in the survey /55%/ believe that pre-graduation traineeships have to be conducted under the supervision of a mentor, 16% think these traineeships have to

be conducted under the supervision of a tutor, 15% - by both a tutor and a mentor, and 14% cannot decide.

During the pre-graduation traineeship in a real-life environment, students develop and consolidate a series of skills, competences and qualities which are an integral part of the modern image of the registered nurse. It is logical that the mentor should be the leading factor in the pre-graduation traineeship, yet the tutor has organizational and control functions. What is important is that the traineeship has to be very well planned and organized, and this constitutes the managerial role of the tutor in the pre-graduation traineeship process.

Since the mentor is a central figure in this process, the professional and personal qualities, as well as the incentives of the mentor, are of vital importance. Therefore, we decided to identify the leading incentives for the respondents to become mentors. The analysis of the results shows that for 61.3% of the surveyed, the driving force is the opportunity to pass their personal experience to their future colleagues. 3.8% consider it prestigious to be mentors. 21.7% believe their work as mentors is a way of personal and professional improvement. 16% of the find their work as mentors personally rewarding and consider it an opportunity to prove their competences, 19.00 % state other incentives. 3.8% of the surveyed are motivated by the opportunity to work with students, and only 12.4% are motivated by the remuneration. The sum total exceeds 100% because the respondents were allowed multiple answers /Fig.3/.

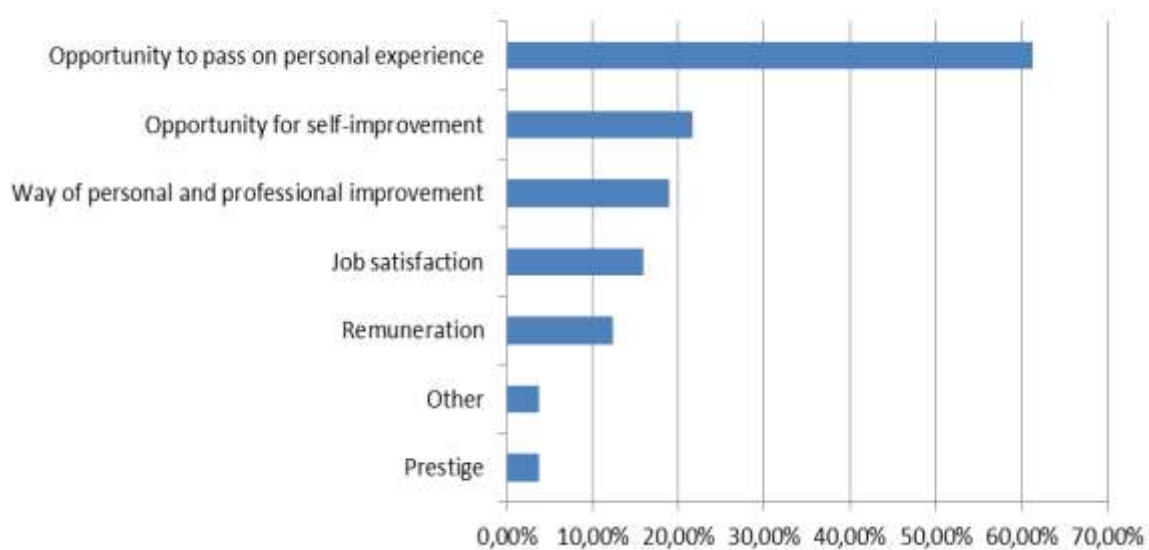


Figure 3: Motivation of the mentors for working as such

It is immediately apparent from Fig.3 that the remuneration is not a driving factor for the majority of the mentors. According to the criterion of position held, the findings show that head nurses and nurse managers are mainly motivated by the opportunity to pass their experience on to the students $P < 0,05$ ($\chi^2 = 5,67$). The role of a mentor invariably adds to the workload of the registered nurse, so in selecting mentors their willingness and consent also have to be taken into consideration. This logically raises the question of the remuneration even though in some European countries mentorship is voluntary. Mentorship is considered professional recognition, honour and prestige. In those countries, nurses apply for mentorship

and their selection is based on certain criteria. The successful applicants attend regulated training before commencing their work as mentors.

Accordingly, the mentors were given the opportunity to outline specific professional requirements that registered nurses conducting students' pre-graduation traineeships have to meet. The highest percentage of the mentors /82.10%/ believe that a Bachelor's or Master's degree in Healthcare Management should be a prerequisite; 57.50% consider a certain number of years of work experience an important condition; according to 50.90% of the respondents professional competences are of vital importance; 42.55% share the opinion that the position held should be a requirement; however, only 13.44% state that nurse managers are suitable mentors.

The analysis shows that the suggestions for a certain number of years of work experience vary widely. According to 53.00% of the respondents, mentors should have at least 5 years' experience, 39.00% believe this period should be 6-10 years, while 8.00% of the surveyed mentors the required work experience should be over 11 years.

In the responses to this question, the following dependencies were established: in terms of "age", respondents aged 51+ believe mentors should have over 10 years of work experience, while younger respondents aged ≤ 30 believe 5 years of work experience to be sufficient $P < 0,05$ ($F=3,32$). In terms of "position held", most head nurses and nurse managers believe the level of education should be an important criterion in selecting mentors $P < 0,05$ ($\chi^2=4,37$). These results show that in developing criteria for selecting mentors, work experience and level of education should be taken into account.

The conducted survey among mentors provides grounds for the following conclusions:

1. The main factors motivating mentors to work with trainees include: the opportunity to pass their personal experience on to their young future colleagues, personal satisfaction, and the opportunity for self-improvement.
2. The mentors agree that they should fulfill certain requirements.
3. Since the mentor is a key figure in pre-graduation traineeships, the following aspects have to be taken into account in developing the selection criteria for mentors:
 - Work experience;
 - Level of education of the applicant for mentor;
 - A list of mentors should be compiled.

Conclusion:

The performed analysis explicitly shows that in the students' practical training in Healthcare, in addition to the required educational qualifications and work experience of the mentor, his/her personal qualities and teaching skills also play a very important role. Mentors are expected not only to ensure the safety of the patient, but also to create suitable working conditions for their trainees.

Acknowledgments: This survey was supported by the National scientific program "Young scientists and post-graduates" of the Medical University of Plovdiv

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