Fellowship Programs

Reflections of an advanced practice nurse fellow

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Newly graduated advanced practice nurses (APNs) often accept positions equipped only with brief, limited training and are expected to primarily learn on the job. APN fellowship programs, such as the oncology fellowship program at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center (SCCC) in Florida, may be a solution to this problem; they provide in-depth training to APNs, offer support through open communication with preceptors, grant APNs opportunities to develop skills and confidence, and allow APNs the time to earn the trust of others at the institution and take on additional responsibilities. This article discusses such programs and focuses on the author's experiences as a fellow at SCCC.

AT A GLANCE

- APNs often lack the preparation and training to care for patients with specific, multifaceted needs.
- APN fellowship programs provide training to newly graduated APNs and support them in specialty areas of practice.
- Comprehensive training in specialty fields produces prepared, confident APNs and contributes to a healthy workplace culture.

KEYWORDS
APN fellowship program; training; new APN graduates; healthy workplace culture

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More than 248,000 advanced practice nurses (APNs) are employed in the United States as of March 2018 (American Association of Nurse Practitioners, 2018). A shift is underway to grant full practice autonomy to nurse practitioners, which would allow these providers to help shoulder the burden of increasing workload demands. Consequently, a need exists for clinicians to enter the field already equipped with the ability to provide care for complex patients, which usually develops over time. However, most new APN hires accept positions having little experience or training in that particular specialty (Flinter, 2011; Hart & Macnee, 2007).

Although most employers offer competitive compensation and benefit plans to attract high-quality employees, there is a new focus on providing a healthy workplace culture (e.g., emphasizing meaning in work, feeling supported and giving support to others, being inspired, treating one another with respect) as well (Seppala & Cameron, 2015). A healthy workplace culture can inspire employees to be actively engaged; when engaged, employees are more productive and can take their positions to new heights (Seppala & Cameron, 2015). Inspired employees also strive to better themselves and their work environment, and they take their jobs seriously (Conlow, 2014).

Realities for New Hires

Most new APNs feel pressure to secure employment as soon as possible prior to or immediately after graduation (Hart & Bowen, 2016). This frequently results in their accepting a position to simply get a foot in the door. Typically, APNs are faced with learning on the job through training that is brief in length and basic in content, which hardly prepares them to care for patients with specific and multifaceted needs, as is often seen across the cancer trajectory (Hart & Bowen, 2016). Despite prevalent diagnoses of cancer worldwide, as well as its ranking as a leading cause of death (World Health Organization, 2018), very few APNs receive specialized training in graduate school to care for patients with cancer (Hart & Bowen, 2016). This leads to feelings of being overwhelmed and lacking confidence and contributes to burnout.

Taking Control

The first step for the newly graduated APN should be taking control of his or her future professional career. Graduates should start by looking for specialized training opportunities offered by facilities they are considering for employment. Commonly known as fellowship or residency opportunities, these intensive training programs are typically offered to licensed APNs who have recently graduated, and they often last for one year. Such programs usually focus on a site-specific or specialty population, allowing the APN fellow to effectively learn the ropes of a new role while building foundational knowledge in his or her specialty area. While taking part in the program, the APN fellow works alongside an expert

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