

Abstract

Relationship History Waynesburg University (WU) has an established relationship with VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) and in March 2009 the first onsite delivery of the RN-to-BSN program will occur at the VAPHS Highland Drive location. Recruitment activities are currently underway to encourage VA nurses to return to school to complete their BSN, and a contract has been negotiated between WU and VAPHS. This onsite delivery will feature a cohort model, with a 30 to 48-credit curriculum which can be completed in three to four terms. Prior to this onsite delivery, VA nurses who wished to complete a BSN were encouraged to attend our program at a regional center convenient to the student. Many VA nurses have enrolled and graduated from this program. In addition, more than a dozen VA nurses have enrolled in our MSN and MSN/MBA programs, attending class at one of our regional centers, and completing a capstone project at VAPHS guided by a VA preceptor. There are also two VA nurses in our DNP program, who also complete practicum hours and capstone project activities at VAPHS under the guidance of a practice site mentor. The nursing programs within WU's GAPS division employ working professional nurses and other healthcare professionals with a minimum of a master's degree to teach in our evening and weekend classes. Currently, ten VAPHS employees teach in the RN to BSN, the MSN, and/or the DNP programs at WU. In addition, more than a dozen VA professional nurses have served as preceptors for master's students during the development and implementation of capstone projects. Several VAPHS employees have provided insight into community-based healthcare for a panel presentation to each cohort in the RN to BSN program during NUR 406: Nursing in the Community. Faculty meetings are held twice each academic year and include both full and part time faculty. Thus, VA employees who currently teach for WU have an opportunity to help implement and refine the curriculum at all levels of the nursing programs. There is a community advisory panel for the MSN program and another community advisory panel for the DNP program. These groups meet at least annually to review the current curriculum and to offer advice on curriculum enhancements, current trends, and opportunities for enhanced partnerships with healthcare institutions and community-based agencies. Five members of the MSN community advisory panel are employees of VAPHS and one member of the DNP panel is a VA employee.

Description of Proposed Program A central focus of our proposed academic partnership is on the expansion of WU's RN-to-BSN program. Our first goal is to build upon the strengths and combined resources of VAPHS and WU Department of Nursing to establish and sustain an on-site VAPHS RN-to-BSN program. We also propose to create a database of "VAPHS Nurse Experts". The purpose of this database is to identify a group of expert nurses within VAPHS who will not be formally participating in this partnership as VA-based faculty, but nonetheless are interested in serving as an academic resource in their own area of clinical expertise. We will match these VAPHS nurses to relevant topics of interest integral to the broad array of academic programs offered at WU. While the academic opportunities available for VAPHS Nurse Experts will remain open to evolution, we anticipate that such activities will include participating in topic-focused panel discussions, providing guest lectures, and partnering with students and faculty on evidence-based practice projects. In addition to incorporating the above innovative educational experiences, we intend to build upon our partnership to work together on a number of collaborative clinical practice initiatives to accomplish the aims of providing excellent care for our Veterans and enhancing the work environment for our VAPHS nurses. These clinical practice initiatives include a (1) Smoking Cessation Clinical Practice Initiative; (2) Mentoring Program; and (3) Evidence-based Practice Partnership Initiative.

Description of New, Enhanced, and Innovative Educational and Practice Opportunities for Students at VAPHS and Waynesburg We propose to create a Leadership Development Academy (LDA), within the RN-to-BSN curriculum, for selected registered nurses who enroll in the WU RN-to-BSN program. Within the first year of the funded VAPHS/WU partnership, we will select 5 admitted RN-to-BSN students. The group who is selected will complete the standard RN-to-BSN curriculum at WU,

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however, in each term the selected members of the LDA will complete alternate assignments to meet course objectives. Each selected student will be assigned a preceptor who will guide the student during the VA based learning activities featured in the LDA. The preceptor will be a VA professional staff nurse who is BSN-prepared, at a minimum. Goals, objectives, and expected outcomes for the LDA will be defined by the partnership faculty and approved by the WU Department of Nursing Curriculum Committee and Nursing Faculty Organization prior to implementation. Following comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the first year LDA, the opportunity to participate will be opened to students who have enrolled in the RN-to-BSN program at WU in its Monroeville and North Hills center.

Within the next one to two years, WU will undergo a curriculum revision based on changing standards from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) for essential content and skill development to be included in a BSN curriculum. New courses may need to be developed, or additional content added to existing courses. This required task provides an opportunity for VAPHS professional nurses to have input into the WU BSN curriculum around areas that have been identified as essential. Content areas to be expanded include the following: organizational and systems leadership for quality care and patient safety; scholarship for evidence-based practice; information management and application of patient care technology; health care policy, finance, and regulatory requirements; interprofessional communication and collaboration for improving patient care outcomes; and clinical prevention and population health. WU faculty will be looking to VAPHS-based faculty and professional nurses to sit on curriculum committees and task forces to revise or enhance courses in both the prelicensure BSN program and the RN-to-BSN program, to ensure that the content is relevant to current and future practice environments and to ensure that teaching/learning activities are stimulating and engaging for students. Through this partnership, additional innovative approaches to curriculum components will evolve and a cadre of well prepared faculty will be available to oversee the implementation.

Roles and Responsibilities of VA-based and School-based Faculty WU faculty will continue their regular teaching assignments across all RN-to-BSN programs including the newly implemented program for VAPHS. WU faculty will oversee the implementation of the LDA and the learning activities that are created for students selected to the LDA. WU-based faculty members will provide ongoing mentorship for the VAPHS-based faculty. The following academic related opportunities will be offered to VAPHS-based faculty: (1) teach classes at WU based on one's educational preparation, area of specialty and work experience; (2) partner with WU-based faculty to develop academic toolkits; (3) collaborate with WU faculty to create an RN-to-BSN Advisory Council; (4) participate in faculty development workshops; (5) serve as preceptor or mentor to students in the clinical setting (e.g. VAPHS/WU Leadership Development Academy students); (6) serve on academic committees; and (7) collaborate on scholarly work related to dissemination, including manuscript submissions and conference presentations.

Faculty Development Program for VA-based Faculty The faculty development plan for VAPHS-based faculty will include the following components: (1) initial week-long continuing education workshop on classroom instruction and clinical teaching strategies; (2) support for course development and preparation to teach specific courses; (3) enrollment (audit or for academic credit if the selected VA-based faculty prefers) in courses offered as components of WU's nursing education certificate; (4) sustained mentoring through individual meetings once a month with a WU faculty mentor and then group meetings of partnership faculty once a month; and (5) support and encouragement by project directors on how to develop presentations and manuscripts for publication that disseminate results of this partnership.