Inspiring Future Nurse Leaders: A Mentoring Program

Brief description of the identified need (100 words):
UnitedHealth Group’s mission is to help people live healthier lives. To live this mission, the organization employs more than 10,000 nurses making it one of the largest employers of nurses in the world. In 2009, organizational data indicated significant turnover in the nurse population, higher than in the non-nurse population. Feedback from nurses indicated a need for defined career paths, enhanced business and financial acumen, networking, professional development opportunities, and the desire to be assigned a mentor. After the collection of this information, UnitedHealth Group’s Center for Nursing Advancement launched several programs to address these opportunities and unmet needs, including a pilot program to determine the effectiveness of a formal nurse mentorship program.

Brief description of the best practice (500 words):
The iNspire (Inspiring Nurse Success and Partnership in Reaching Excellence) Mentorship program goals are to improve nurse retention and engagement, support personal and professional development of nurses, increase the understanding of roles of nurses within UnitedHealth Group, promote business acumen and support networking opportunities. The program also provides participants with the opportunity to interact with senior leaders and participate in projects to improve quality or process.

- **Selection Process**
The Center for Nursing Advancement makes a call for mentor/mentee interest approximately two months prior to the start of a cohort. Forty self-nominated mentees and paired mentors participated in the initial “pilot” program. Due to significant interest in the program and to meet the demand, the number of participants increased to fifty during the second program offering. In the second and third cohorts, an online, open mentoring platform supports the pairing of mentors and mentees using criteria that matches development opportunities of the mentee with the strength and skills of a mentor.

- **Mentoring**
During the 12-month mentoring relationship, participants engage in one to four hours per month of one-on-one mentoring both locally and virtually. The mentor/mentee relationship is a reciprocal one where mentees share goals and development needs while mentors share business perspectives and knowledge. Mentees schedule monthly sessions with their mentor and a plan of development is created with distinct goals and actions to be taken to achieve those goals. The ultimate objective is mentee development with progress updates shared with the mentee’s manager and included in the mentee’s formal development plan.
• **Curriculum**
Mentors and mentees participate in lunch and learn sessions offering nursing CEU/CCM credits.*Six sessions are required and nine additional sessions are offered as optional development opportunities. Curricula development is determined by feedback from the nursing population. Recorded presentation replays are available for nurses unable to attend live presentations. Additional mentor and mentee training and check-in sessions help to round out the curriculum. Required curriculum offerings have included topics such as:
  - Kick-Off Webcast
  - Mentor Training
  - Professional Development Plan*
  - Developing a Personal Mission*
  - Nurse Leadership and Professionalism*
  - How to Climb the Career Ladder without Getting Dizzy and Falling Off*
  - Emotional Intelligence
  - Positivity
  - Business Acumen*; and,
  - Maximizing Mentoring and Securing Sponsorship*
Optional Brown Bag Lunch lecture topics have included "Taking Charge of Your Health", UnitedHealth Group Culture, nursing clinical alignment, presentations by business segment leaders, quality management and performance, healthcare reform, and a mentor and mentee alumni panel discussion.

• **Additional Development Opportunities**
Bi-monthly discussion groups are offered so that mentors and mentees can share experiences and networking with nurse colleagues in other business segments. At the conclusion of the formal mentorship program, mentors and mentees are able to continue the relationship as an informal sponsorship or mentees may choose to become a mentor in the next cohort. Alumni are invited to join program committees and participate as subject matter experts or, based on their level of expertise, lead program process improvement teams. Those not ready to lead teams can opt to serve as co-team leads and move into a full lead role after shadowing a leader for one year.

**Brief description of results, including any impact on learning (300 Words):**
The business impact is measured in multiple ways, including program satisfaction, employee engagement, position changes such as promotions and lateral moves, and manager feedback.
- Data is gathered from the cohort at two unique points during the program.
  - At 6 months after program start, participants completed a survey to determine the rate of program engagement.
  - Data is collected again at one year to measure program satisfaction, program impact and outcomes including voluntary termination, promotions, or lateral job moves. Human capital statistics are included.
- The results were validated by 2 proportion tests for retention, promotion, and engagement; and Chi-Square tests for Likert survey rating results.

**Results:**
- **Retention:** The rate of voluntary turnover for the participants was 0% while the UnitedHealth Group RN population had a statistically significant higher rate (P-value 0.000). The iNspire group had a 203% higher promotion rate (21.5%) than the general nursing population (7.1%) (P-value 0.020).
- **Program engagement:** 54 members participated in the three month survey. An 89% positive engagement rate was achieved for mentor/mentee relationships (sum of
positives versus negatives P-value 0.000). Twenty-five mentors and thirty mentees responded to the final program survey. This is a 69% return rate.

- **Program satisfaction**: A cumulative favorable rating of 84% was calculated for “overall program satisfaction”, “partnership expectations met”, and “developing a high level of trust between the mentor and mentee”.
- **Professional development**: 84% of mentees reported “My mentor helped me make significant progress toward my development goals in the program”
- **Manager engagement**: Mentees report an 82% favorable rating for manager support of their participation. 80% of managers reported that they would refer others to the program (10% neutral).
- **Curriculum**: On a 3-point scale, the following categories rated above 2.64: curriculum offered thus far, future curriculum, and additional/opportional opportunities for enrichment.

**Description of the organization (e.g., hospital, community clinic, nursing home):**
The iNspire program was conducted at UnitedHealth Group, a leading health and well-being company offering a comprehensive array of products and services through our Health Benefits and Health Services businesses. UnitedHealth Group serves more than 78 million individuals, employs more than 100,000 people (approximately 10,000 nurses), operates in all 50 states and more than 50 nations worldwide. With over 10,000 nurses working in various businesses in UnitedHealth Group, success depends in part, on a strong connection with the nurses. In 2008, UnitedHealth Group launched the Center for Nursing Advancement to recognize the contribution of nurses in the organization and to create a resource dedicated to advancing the special interests, opportunities, and challenges shared by nurses at UnitedHealth Group.

**Description of the learners for which the best practice is focused, if any (e.g., non-nursing personnel, new graduates, clinical nurse III):**
To be eligible for participation, one had to be a nurse within a UnitedHealth Group business segment with tenure of one year or more. Mentees were required to have three or more years of work experience as well the ability and interest to commit time on a regular basis, and the desire to continue to grow and advance personally and professionally. Mentor requirements were five or more years of professional experience with demonstration of developing/coaching others and having subject matter expertise.

**Scope of resources and time required:**
Each year, the new iNspire cohort begins at the graduation of the previous cohort. Curriculum planning begins well in advance of each cohort and involves an executive sponsor from the senior leadership team, a program lead, a curriculum team lead, and a curriculum team. On average, mentors & mentees spend one to four hours per month on iNspire activities, including one-on-one meetings, attendance at iNspire programs, phone discussion groups, individual research, and completion of assignments.

**Lessons learned:**
1. Mentors need mentoring. Leaders have a lot to share but sometimes wonder where to start and what to do. Hands on tools, books, and stories shared by experienced mentors made a positive and significant impact on mentor engagement and success in the program.
2. Virtual mentoring can be effective. Virtual methods of communicating and participation such as monthly phone discussion groups, newsletters/email from the Center, and the ULink social networking community made up 80% of the positive ratings for useful tools, while in person meet and greet opportunities were in the lower 10th percentile.
3. Nurse mentorship can support personal and professional development and increase engagement. Here are some quotes from program participants:
   - “The hiring manager was impressed by my participation in the iNspire program and how by looking at different career options and participating in exploratory interviews I was able to identify which position best fit my experience. I feel that this experience was instrumental in obtaining the new position”.
"When I started the iNspire program my resume read like a job description. It told everything that I did but did not speak to the successes and outcomes. I worked with my mentor to create a new and improved resume. During the interview the hiring manager said, “Your resume speaks for itself”.

“I have had the recent opportunity to be an iNspire mentor. It is a gift to be allowed to be part of someone's growth journey. And while the process is all about the mentee, I promise you the gift goes both ways.”

Finally, “...is one of two of my staff that participated in the program. It was wonderful for professional development. I've worked for two large health plans and we never had anything like this”.

**Any funding sources for the best practice:**
The iNspire Program is operated by employees of the Center for Nursing Advancement, volunteers from the Center's executive and advisory boards, and nurse leaders from across the eight UnitedHealth Group business groups. The Center has partnered with the University of Minnesota, the American Nurses Credentialing Center, and the Case Management Society of America to offer continuing education at no cost to program participants. The cost of continuing education units may be offset by the savings in lower voluntary turnover at a benefit to cost ratio of 9:1. There are limitations to the return on investment claim. Multiple factors impact retention; and there is significant selection bias as members are pre-screened for participation. However, a study of 302 UnitedHealth Group nurses revealed that opportunities for professional growth and development had a statistically significant positive impact on how long a nurse intends to continue working at UnitedHealth Group (P-value 0.000, 0.003); while the lack of these opportunities had a statistically significant negative impact (P-value 0.002). (Meyer, 2011 )

**Any products developed:**
Many programs, development opportunities, and reference materials resulted from the iNspire Mentorship program.

- The program has graduated from a “pilot” program to a fully implemented program offered annually to qualified UnitedHealth Group nurses. The program is scalable to larger groups and can be leveraged to reach a greater number of nurses in the organization.
- The Center for Nursing Advancement has developed a Nurse Residency Program, which is a pilot program focusing on transitioning nurses from a clinical setting into the business environment utilizing a structure similar to the iNspire program structure.
- A company sponsored internal social networking site, “ULINK” allows networking and sharing of resources.
- A standardized educational curriculum was developed.
- Virtual peer forums (support groups) and a monthly newsletter provide less formal support.
- Manager toolkits assist with professional growth and creation of development plans.
- An alumni program supports the cohort alumni by providing access to curriculum, networking connections and resources.
- A poster presentation was submitted to the Association for Nurse Professional Development for the 2013 Convention.

**Works Cited**