NNSDO Best Practice: Cone Health Nurse Extern Program: A Themed Approach

Name of the main organization: Cone Health/Greensboro, NC

Name and title and credentials of the submitter:
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Brief description of the identified need:
Cone Health has provided nurse externship to rising senior nursing students for over 30 years. In the past, the program introduced classroom topics pertinent to the nursing workplace setting. Topics such as time management, organizational vision, nurse recruitment, and stress reduction were determined to be redundant with our new graduate curriculum. Program feedback from participants identified a need for more interactive and engaging classroom exercises to prepare the externs for future nursing roles. The team conducted a literature search on nursing externships. Additionally, we contacted local nurse externship programs to gather ideas. Our goal was to enhance the nurse externship experience at Cone Health. After collecting this valuable information, staff educators developed a more innovative and engaging nurse extern program.

Brief description of the best practice:
The nurse extern program’s “Destination RN” theme is symbolized by an airplane taking flight. To encompass this theme, flight related experiences were used in both classroom presentations and activities. This include: boarding, take off, reaching cruising altitude, landing, and reporting to baggage claim. During the 10-week program, students meet bi-weekly for hour long classes. Redundant class materials have been replaced with curriculum reflecting suggestions from program feedback and research. Passports are stamped after journal sharing activities that are tied to a geographic location based on their weekly clinical experiences. Geographic location examples include: war zone (7 deaths in ED from a local shooting incident), the equator (NICU heating lamps turned on for 5 baby admissions), being in Paris or New York (understanding unfamiliar cultural norms) or a serene ocean (caring for a dying patient in Palliative Care). Time is allotted for in-depth discussions in a non-judging environment. Program concludes with celebration honoring the RN Preceptors and Nurse Extern’s accomplishments.

Operational Description

Week 1: Welcome Aboard
- Welcome Reception, Program Description, and Program Expectations
- Meet your Pilots (Facilitators) and Flight Staff (Chief Nursing Officer and Preceptors)

Week 2: Take Off
- Sharing of Journal Entries (Cognitive Domain)
  Clinical experiences are shared in class by describing a geographic location that best exemplifies the experience.
- Team Building Exercises (Affective Domain)
  Creative exercise built around addressing values, attitudes, and interests.

Week 3: Cruising Altitude
- Sharing of Journal Entries
- Discuss Survival Kit (Affective Domain)
  Caring for self-in-flight is incorporated while effectively caring for patients.
Week 4: **Preparing for Landing**
- Sharing of Journal Entries
- Simulation- (Psychomotor Domain)
  
  *Soft Skills Simulation dealing with scenarios such as conflict between co-workers, service recovery, and difficult patient scenarios.*

Week 5: **Baggage Claim**
- Sharing of Journal Entries
- Panel (Cognitive/Affective Domains)
  
  *Shared discussion with experienced staff.*
- Retention Nurse and Recruitment (Cognitive)
  
  *Focused around post-graduation.*

Week 6: **Destination RN has LANDED**
- Celebration and Preceptor Recognition
- Photo journey of their (trip)

**Brief description of results, including any impact on learning:**

The themed approach was implemented in 2010 resulting in a 98% satisfaction by the participants. Comments on feedback questionnaires note nurse externs felt “supported” and “valued.” Since 2010, an average of 90% of externs returned for employment compared to an average of 50% in previous years. For 2012, we are doubling the number of participants in the program. Utilization of the themed approach process has also been adopted for another Staff Education program development and **successfully** being implemented.

**Description of the organization (e.g., hospital, community clinic, nursing home):**

Cone Health is a network of five Magnet designated hospitals totaling over 1,000 inpatient beds, numerous outpatient facilities, and several Centers of Excellence. Established in 1911, Cone Health has grown into one of the premier healthcare institutions in North Carolina. We are looking forward to our second 5-hospital Magnet re-designation in 2013.

**Description of the learners for which the best practice is focused, if any (e.g., non-nursing personnel, new graduates, clinical nurse III):**

Select rising senior nursing students to have hands on experiential mentoring by a seasoned RN during this 10-week paid summer experience. Each applicant must complete the interview/hiring process as a new hire Nursing Technician would.

**Scope of resources and time required:**

Nurse Extern project management starts at the conclusion of each program. Representation at the planning table includes the Program Coordinators, Staff Education Manager, Chief Nursing Officer, and Recruitment. Timelines addresses student interviews, initial hire competencies, and implementation of identified improvements. The educational component is decided six months prior to program start. The coordinators facilitate the classroom time and coordinate pre-extern orientation for the Department Directors and Preceptors.

**Any lessons learned:**

Realizing that there is a need for improvement was the first step. The themed approach gave us ease to be creative and confident in the planning stages of the program, not to mention the “fun” every nurse
extern has on their "trip." Using a themed approach process has also been adopted and successfully being implemented in other programs in Staff Education. Although the themed approach has nothing to do with the recruitment process, we have found out that we need to work closely with the recruitment team to gather fully qualified candidates.

**Any funding sources for the best practice:**
The funding resource allotment was projected and generated from the annual non-Salary budget for Staff Education. This include program materials such as binders, activity supplies, welcome reception, and celebration catering. Additionally, the Chief Nursing Officer has supported the salary for the 30 nurse externs for the 10-week program.

**Any products developed:**
Poster Presentation has been accepted for 2012 NNSDO Convention in Boston, MA.