

Student Mentorship: An Expansive Role of a Teacher

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It is important for a teacher to impart, imbibe and acquire moral values which help students face life's challenges and become good citizens. Teachers should work hard to teach students so that they might excel in academics and do well in extra-curricular activities. Teachers should be able to allow students to express themselves, be creative and allow their talents to bloom like a flower.

William Butler Yeats said, 'Education should not be the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire'. Where does that fire come from? Who lights it? It comes when a sensitive teacher discovers the potential of a child, when he/she realises that all students do not have the same need and when s(he) stops comparing children.

The teacher should adopt a teaching style that teaches students to use their innate abilities and talents and live a life, which is much more than merely teaching them how to make a living. Teachers need to reinforce their faith in the power of giving to others. Teachers should ensure that there is scrupulous adherence to discipline by the students and this can be only attained if they are disciplined themselves. Teachers should influence in the character building of the students. A student should be impressed by the candour, modesty and wisdom of a teacher. A teacher's charm, exuberance and warmth should be endearing to the students. A teacher should always remind the students that marks are not always the yardstick of success, but what one does along the way matters a lot too.

"Educating the mind without educating the heart, is no education at all", said Aristotle. Even as we impart education to match the advancement of health technology and globalisation, we need to march our students ahead with the ethos of the Nursing Profession which is 'Caring with Compassion'.

Knowledge, imagination and innovation should be encouraged through a holistic approach. Teachers should be encouraged to teach at their best and students should be motivated to learn to their utmost. It's the art of a teacher to enable the students to recognise their hidden abilities and talents. The responsibility of training a student into a good nurse coupled with a good

human being, rests on the shoulders of the teachers. Supervision, support and guidance of student nurses in the classroom and clinical area are the important aspects of mentorship. Teachers must facilitate and develop competence in the student nurses and promote quality learning experience in the clinical settings.

Meaning of Mentoring

The notion of mentoring is historical. The original mentor was described by 'Homer', as the 'The Wise and Trusted Counsellor'. A fundamental difference between mentoring and advising is, former is more than advising; mentoring is personal, as well as a professional relationship. In the broad sense, a mentor is someone who takes special interest in helping a pupil to develop into a successful professional. The mentoring relationship between a teacher and student expands beyond teaching to advancement in the educational and personal growth of the student.

Role of the Mentor

Definition: To mentor someone has been defined as: "To support and encourage individuals to manage their own learning in order that they may maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be" (Parsloe, 2009).

Mentoring in nursing is a dynamic and collaborative process. Effective mentoring increases student performance, retention of knowledge, and commitment. There is a lack of mentorship in the nursing profession in the Indian context, although the literature is replete with evidences of how mentoring has been beneficial in the overall development of a student. Mentoring is beneficial for the mentors and also for the mentee. In order for the mentoring to be successful, the mentor should have faith in the mentee.

Motivation and empowerment generate mentoring, where both the mentor and mentee share their skills. In order to have an effective mentoring relationship, the mentor must try to remove obstacles, give emotional support, and allow for recognition of achievement in the work setting. Thus mentees are encouraged to work harder to achieve their goals and ultimately achieve higher self-esteem as well (Grossman, 2012).

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Each student has a different need. Different students require varied amounts of attention, motivation, guidance and advice. Some students feel comfortable and confident in approaching the mentors, wherein some may be shy and reluctant to seek help. A good mentor is the one who can understand the individual need of a student.

However, it is vital that mentoring remains a professional partnership with clear boundaries that differentiate the role from that of a friend, to enable the mentor to balance the need to provide both supportive guidance with the requirement to make objective, unbiased assessment and decisions on their progress (Casey & Clark, 2011). It is the role of the mentors to groom the novice nurse to a competent nurse professional. The role of a nurse mentor is to help the students to translate theory into practice and make the classroom teaching a reality. They have the role of passing on the knowledge and skills to the students.

Elements of Mentorship

Huybrecht et al (2011) identified four elements considered important for mentors.

1. Ability to give feedback experience: Feedback given in the right way and with right intention is an avenue for better performance by the student. Each student has the right to know their strengths and weaknesses. Feedback should be delivered frequently and carefully. A mentor should make the feedback session a positive process and experience for the student. Timely and targeted feedback makes the process more effective. Feedback sessions should be regular and not unexpected. A mentor should always remember that he/she should be specific while giving feedback. Feedback should be critically and constructively structured and a teacher should ensure that he/she criticises the student in private. While giving feedback, a mentor should keep in mind to focus both the positive and negative aspects, as that would give a scope for improvement. Feedback should be always given by the mentor's perspective.

2. Availability of time: Frequent student-teacher interaction is a critical component of mentoring. The teacher needs to address to the need of the students and that can be attained only if the teacher gives time to the student. It is important for the teacher to talk to the students personally to ensure their needs. Mentors should be available and accessible for open communication and questions. During the conversation between mentor and mentee, there should be exchange of knowledge, ways to improve skills and strategies to be adopted to apply knowledge into practice. A good mentoring requires

time, commitment, sincerity, continual support and willingness to share information.

3. Positive attitude: The attitude of the mentors is more important than the learning environment. Student's look out for role models in their mentors. It is important for the mentors to become positive role models for the students. His / her positive vibe greatly impacts the students. A mentor should enhance the strengths and dilute the weaknesses of the student. The mentor should develop strategies to explore possible solutions for the weaknesses.

4. Patience and enthusiasm: A good mentor exhibits patience and enthusiasm, and motivates the students by grooming them into responsible human beings. A mentor needs to take interest in the needs of the students. These attributes are incredibly important for a mentor. Great mentors will tide over momentary periods of frustration by exercising patience.

Eller et al (2014) conducted a qualitative study to assess the key components of an effective mentoring relationship. The participants were from 12 universities in three regions of the US. The study findings derived eight themes which described key components of an effective mentoring relationship: (1) open communication and accessibility; (2) goals and challenges; (3) passion and inspiration; (4) caring personal relationship; (5) mutual respect and trust; (6) exchange of knowledge; (7) independence and collaboration; and (8) role modelling.

Aspects of Good Mentoring Practice

1. Non-judgmental
2. Unbiased
3. Careful listening
4. Providing 'protected time' and 'undivided attention'
5. Sharing success and failure stories
6. Build relationships and confidence
7. Taking special interest
8. Continuous assessment of progress
9. Avoiding reprimanding in public
10. Interactive reflective discussions
11. Supplement information and sharing knowledge
12. Understand individual needs of the students
13. Augment the learning process

Difference between Mentoring, Coaching and Counselling

Mentoring is a working relational experience through which one person (experienced) empowers and enables another by sharing their wisdom and resources.

Coaching is a process that enables learning and development to occur and helps performance of the

other person to improve. Mentoring is an informal relationship. Counselling is a formal relationship. A mentor can be met in a variety of settings (i.e., meals, phone calls, planned meetings). A counsellor is met by appointment, in an office, to discuss the next phase of accomplishing particular goal(s).

Conducting a Mentoring Session

Before the Session

Objective: The teacher lays a foundation for informal relationships through productive meeting with the student

Steps

1. The teacher identifies the students who needs mentoring, by gathering information from their cumulative record, academic performance in examination, record of attendance, anecdotal record.
2. The target outcomes should be clearly defined.
3. Approach the student and give a date/time/venue for the meeting with the student.
4. Provide a context to help the student understand the teacher and state the objective for the meeting.
5. Confirm the meeting a day or two in advance.

During the Session

Objective: The teacher gets to know the student

Steps

1. Demonstrate professionalism by being prompt and prepared.
2. Set up the conversation which is relevant and valuable.
3. Talk about the performance of the students and understand the insight of the student regarding the studies.
4. Do not try to retrieve personal information, as might lead to inhibition from the students' side to rely on the teacher.
5. Ensure careful listening and do not make unnecessary judgments.
6. Focus on the individual need of the student.
7. Ask questions pertaining to the reasons for regular absenteeism and poor performance in both theoretical and practical examinations.
8. Establish a mutually agreed upon plan for future mentoring sessions.
9. Ensure the confidentiality of the information shared.
10. Provide solutions, achievable targets to the students and supplement information based on the experience and knowledge of the teacher. There should be a collaborative development of appropriate goals and

strategies for achieving the goals.

11. The teacher should display patience and enthusiasm throughout the session.
12. The teacher provides a timeline for achieving visible changes in behaviour and performance

After the Session

Objective: The teacher lays the foundation for the future interactions

Steps

1. Follow-up with the student on regular basis to ensure the attainment of visible change in behaviour and performance.
2. Provide timely and adequate positive reinforcement to the students.
3. Ensure a commitment to an action as a result of the mentoring session.
4. Measuring progress with timelines and providing constructive feedback.
5. At the next meeting, start with the updates on the progress of the student.

Implication of Mentoring for Faculty Development

There are many implications of mentoring for faculty development, some of which are:

1. Improved job satisfaction
2. Instils a sense of belongingness to the workplace
3. Improves student-teacher relationship
4. Improves the performance of the students
5. Helps to understand a plethora of challenges faced by students
6. Opportunity to work across boundaries of gender/race/ethnicity/sexual orientation/culture/religion.

Additional Responsibilities of Nurse Mentors

- ☐ Share the knowledge of patient care and act as a positive role model.
- ☐ Being familiar with the student's programme of study and practice assessment documentation.
- ☐ Identify specific learning opportunities considering that the learning experience is a planned process.
- ☐ Observe students practising skills under the appropriate level of supervision.
- ☐ Provide time for reflection, feedback, monitoring and documenting of a student's progress.
- ☐ Assess competence and patient safety, in keeping with the assessment documentation.

- ❑ Give students constructive feedback, with suggestions on how to make improvements to promote progress.
- ❑ Report any untoward incidents or concerns to the head of department.

Barriers to Good Mentoring

There are challenges and barriers inherent in good mentoring. These are: (a) Lack of interest in the needs of student, (b) Lack of preparedness, (c) Lack of time, and (d) Lack of support

Conclusion

Supportive mentors have a vital role in empowering the student nurses and also instilling in them a positive attitude towards nursing profession. Mentorship can result in effective and fruitful relationship between the teacher and student. The results of good mentoring live after us, as our students continue to contribute to the profession even after we have retired.

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