Accelerated Second-Degree Bachelor of Science in Nursing Graduates: Experience of the Transition to Professional Practice

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INTRODUCTION

Accelerated second baccalaureate degree nursing (ASBSN) programs enable non-nurse college graduates to streamline their nursing education and begin professional practice. However, few studies have investigated their transition to practice.

BACKGROUND

ASBSN PROGRAMS AND STUDENTS

- Programs are brief (12-18 months) and intense
- Students have a non-nursing baccalaureate degree
- Students are older, motivated, and eager to learn, with previous life experiences
- ASBSN graduates are similar in post-graduation performance to traditional BSN graduates

RESEARCH ON TRANSITION TO PRACTICE

- New nurses often feel overwhelmed and experience stress
- Contributing factors include unfamiliar work culture and the theory-practice gap
- Strategies to ease the transition include extended preceptorships and residency programs

RESEARCH ON ASBSN TRANSITION TO PRACTICE (CALHOUN, 2010)

- ASBSN graduates experience similar stress as non-ASBSN graduates
- Skepticism regarding the quality of accelerated nursing education may be exhibited by colleagues
- Teamwork, a key aspect of professional practice, was a familiar survival skill developed in school

RESULTS

- A combination of how the ASBSN program prepared me and how I prepared myself.
  “Our preparation really started in the classroom.”
- Get my foot in the door and make myself shine.
  “I had my portfolio of things I had done, I had a list of questions for them, and I had... researched their organization... before I went in.”
- Intense situations evoked strong emotions.
- The pace of progression fit my needs.
- How I spent my time was an important factor in orientation.
- Building my own support network.
- Keeping the patient safe as I built confidence.
- Being on my own was frightening.
- I had supportive colleagues and plentiful help.
  “I felt like I knew what I was doing and I wasn’t asking everybody questions all the time. I was answering people’s questions.”
- The ASBSN program mirrored the intensity of real-life nursing and helped me transition to practice.
  “You were used to being stressed, you were used to being pushed, you were used to the longer hours.”

DISCUSSION

Aspects of these ASBSN graduates’ transition experience were similar to those of non-ASBSN graduates. They prepared themselves for job interviews and networked to get interviews. Interestingly, none of the graduates mentioned being asked about their first degrees during job interviews.

Similar to BSN graduates from traditional programs, ASBSN graduates reported feeling overwhelmed during the transition to practice. They acknowledged the importance of insightful preceptors to their transition, as did other new nurses. They reported feeling fear during their first month “off” orientation, double-checking their decisions with knowledgeable colleagues to validate their clinical reasoning and maintain patient safety.

Finally, the ASBSN graduates noted that the accelerated BSN program's intensity helped prepare them for the fast pace and long hours of nursing practice.

Potential employers of ASBSN graduates would do well to learn about and capitalize on the graduates' first degrees. Their maturity, knowledge and skill in other fields, and success in accelerated, intense nursing programs give them the potential to move relatively quickly into leadership positions.

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