

Revitalizing the Student Nurse Association

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Abstract

Nursing is considered one of the most demanding majors in college. A Student Nurse Association provides an avenue for nursing students to give each other support during this demanding major. Nursing students experience many benefits when involved in a Student Nurse Association while in school. These benefits include developing leadership skills, mentoring and being mentored by senior level students, participating in college and community activities and learning about the professional role of the nurse. This article identifies strategies to organize and revitalize your schools Student Nurse Association. These strategies include ways to increase student participation and increase awareness and promote activity in the SNA.

On many campuses nursing is often identified as one of the most demanding majors. Students often comment that nursing education is stressful. In addition to the demands of coursework, many students work, have family responsibilities and try to enjoy the lifestyle of a college student. Nursing faculty, cognizant of these stressors provide support and guidance to nursing students. While nursing faculty are cognizant of these variables, they do not really know what the student is experiencing. Only other students who have been there or are currently experiencing the situation know what is happening. The Student Nurse Association (SNA) is a valuable program that can promote camaraderie, encouragement and support for nursing students, while fostering professional role development and leadership behaviors. The SNA can function to meet the needs of students at all levels of nursing education. Therefore, it is extremely important for nursing students to become involved in a Student Nurse Association (SNA). This article will examine ways in which an SNA can be revitalized within a nursing program.

A successful SNA begins with a commitment from the nursing department and the students. At the beginning of every academic year, a faculty representative should be appointed to the SNA. Because the faculty representative provides support, guidance, and encouragement to the officers it is imperative that the faculty representative be very engaged in working with this group. The role of the faculty representative may be identified within the structure of the institutions student government or student organizations. If the role is poor defined or is very superficial, the faculty representative may refer to the *Guidelines for Consultants and Advisors* that can be found on the

national Student Nurse Association (NSNA) web site (www.nсна.org). The faculty representative should meet with the officers at least monthly to plan future meetings and activities and to discuss issues. The faculty representative should meet with the officers at least monthly to discuss issues, plan future meetings and plan future activities. The faculty representative should also be responsible for promoting the SNA to other faculty members as well as nursing students at all levels. The faculty representative attends all SNA meetings. Most importantly, the faculty representative serves as a role model for leadership behaviors to the SNA.

The student commitment begins with soliciting those students who are willing to participate in SNA and run for office. Officers include a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary depending upon the bylaws of the organization. Generally, the officers are upper division nursing students. These students are more experienced with the workings of the nursing department, as well as the college or university. The students who choose to run for office may spend time campaigning and may want to create their own “platform” which includes their ideas for the SNA. Elections are held once a year with all nursing students encouraged to vote.

The first item that demands immediate attention by the faculty member and the SNA officers is the bylaws. For many programs it may have been several years since the bylaws have been reviewed; other programs may not have bylaws. If there are no bylaws, the SNA can consult with the institutions student government for help and guidance in developing the bylaws. A handbook from the NSNA, *Getting the Pieces to Fit*, is an

excellent resource for the development of bylaws, policies and procedures. The officers of the SNA will work with the faculty representative to either write or review the bylaws.

This process should be done at least every three to four years. Part of the bylaws may consist of the development of committees within the SNA. Examples of committees to include are fundraising, SNA newsletter, and activities.

The more challenging aspect of revitalizing the SNA is getting the students involved. This is their organization and primarily their responsibility. This may be very overwhelming for students especially with all the other demands of a nursing program. Meeting times need to be planned when there is maximum opportunity for everyone to attend. For continuity, it is helpful to have a specific day and time each month for meetings. Things to consider when planning meeting times include evening classes that students may be taking, exams that may be occurring the day after the meeting and pre-assessment and preparation for clinical the next day. The SNA meeting schedule should be communicated to the nursing faculty and the entire nursing student body, including students who are interested in nursing or have declared nursing as their major. Students who have not started with nursing courses should be encouraged to attend to get acclimated into the nursing culture. Communicating the meeting dates can be accomplished by making announcements in nursing classes, in prerequisite nursing courses, such as anatomy and physiology, sending an email to all nursing majors and declared nursing majors and posting the schedule on the SNA bulletin board and webpage.

Another good and effective way to communicate information is through a webpage designed for SNA. A link to the SNA web site should be visible on the nursing departments' homepage. The SNA homepage should be developed by the SNA in conjunction with a person from the Information Technology department. Items to include on the homepage include meeting dates and times, a link to the NSNA, and other links of importance to nursing students, such as the National Council of State Boards of Nursing. The webpage is maintained by the SNA and should be reviewed every year.

The SNA officers can offer enticements to students to attend meetings. Enticements can include raffles, guest speakers, and food. Many businesses are willing to donate food or nursing products to a SNA. The SNA can have a raffle at each meeting where students have a chance of winning items such as a sandwich at a fast food restaurant, clipboards, drug books or other items that have been donated by businesses. Also, guest speakers are an enticement to increase student attendance. Guest speakers may include representatives from the military, nurse recruiters from hospitals, and alumni to share their experience with NCLEX exam and their experience on being a new nurse. Faculty may also facilitate student attendance by making SNA meetings part of their course requirements to illustrate the need to attend professional organizations.

Another way to increase participation in SNA is through the committees. The committee structure may be formal, such as standing committees which may be found in the bylaws; or informal, in which new committees are formed for the completion of a task as

suggested from the members of SNA. Through the committee structure, students who do not want to be an officer may want to be involved through work on a committee. In addition, committees encourage participation of all SNA members, especially underclassmen. Members of SNA who are not officers can work independently with their committee members to organize fundraisers, participate in community activities that promote health and wellness such as the Breast Cancer walk, collect food and clothing for a family in need during the holidays and put together a newsletter to highlight the SNA. Depending on the size of the SNA, 2-3 are needed to work on each committee. This is a good way to get the underclassmen initially involved in SNA and groomed to become an officer once into the nursing curriculum.

The SNA newsletter is a great way to highlight the activities of the SNA as well as communicate information to students, faculty and alumni. Students may choose to devote a column that focuses on a different faculty member each issue. This is a way for all students to become more familiar with the faculty. Topics to be included in this column include education, nursing background, family, interests and hobbies. Alumni may also be asked to write a column for the SNA newsletter and may focus on the transition from nursing school to the real world. Other topics to that may be considered for the newsletter include examples of NCLEX-RN review questions with rationale, and announcements of upcoming events. The nursing department may also wish to contribute to the newsletter by sharing the activities of the faculty or the department. Our nursing department utilized the SNA newsletter to keep them informed and help them prepare for

a reaccreditation site visit. The newsletter can be sent to students, faculty and alumni electronically or posted on the web page of the SNA.

Finally, put some fun into the SNA. The SNA can be a part of community programs that support health and wellness. This includes participating in the American Heart Association Heartwalk, the Breast Cancer Walk, the Walk for Diabetes. The SNA can design and order t-shirts to wear at these events. The SNA can also work with the community blood bank and sponsor a blood drive. The SNA can sponsor a night where the group gets together to watch a movie or a television show. Our SNA has sponsored a Grey's Anatomy night which seems appropriate being a nursing student. Other fun activities include having a potluck and other activities during finals week.

The benefits of a nursing program having an SNA are numerous. The SNA provides an avenue for students to begin their professional life. Active participation in a nursing group during school will hopefully translate into active involvement in a professional organization following graduation. Active involvement in SNA also helps students develop leadership skills. Additionally, SNA meetings are an opportunity for nursing students to network with each other and mentor each other through the nursing program. Learning these mentoring behaviors will assist the student nurse to use these same behaviors after graduation when seeking a mentor as a new graduate and subsequently mentoring novice nurses.

The SNA is a valuable experience for nursing students. The nursing department has to show a commitment to the SNA in order for the group to be successful. Student participation in SNA is very challenging and may wax and wane during the course of the academic year. It is important to not get discouraged if participation declines but continue to work towards active involvement by students in the SNA. It is worth the effort.