

Cultivating Communities of Practice for Nurse Practitioners



CHSRF/CIHR Chair Program in
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THE ISSUE

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are gaining recognition in the health sector as a model for fostering learning networks, knowledge exchange and practice innovations. However, there is very little research regarding (CoPs) and how they help with healthcare improvement.

THE PURPOSE

To look at how the British Columbia (BC) Regional Health Authorities used CoPs as a way to support Nurse Practitioner (NP) role development, integration and sustainability.

What did we do?

A participatory action research (PAR) study was conducted with health leaders and NPs to look at the effects of collaboration on NP role integration, and CoPs as a way to promote NP role development. Eleven NPs from the Interior Health Authority (IHA) in BC engaged in five data sessions and two action meetings held in IHA. A nurse leader introduced the concept of CoPs and engaged early with the new NP employees to determine their needs and concerns and cultivate a shared responsibility for the new NP role. NP group sessions were audio-taped and transcribed for data analysis. The action meetings included an audio-taped session to discuss organizational planning of the NP role with health authority leaders.

What did we find?

The study found the NP CoPs to be a dynamic and significant resource to both NPs and leaders. Shared leadership and the collaborative nature of the NP CoP helped to mutually address matters of practice and policy. The collaborative model resulted in a structure to explore role development tensions, plan and secure evidence and strategize about the future. In addition, the CoPs contributed to all four health domains of education, practice, research and leadership.

How will this research help?

Five key characteristics of the CoP were found to benefit health care improvement. These include:

1. a collective identity that promotes collaboration.
2. a knowledge exchange network to enhance professional competencies.
3. generating new knowledge.
4. affirming professional identity.
5. acting as a stewardship for strategic improvement.

What's next?

There is a need to further develop collaborative efforts among healthcare leaders and NPs to effectively prepare and support NP role development, integration and sustainability.

BOTTOM LINE?

The collaborative approach of using Communities of Practice for NP role development and integration can help to advance the NP role in healthcare.

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