Nurse Residency Accreditation:
An Approach for Organizational Engagement

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For the last 15 years, the nursing profession has ranked highest in the deployment of honest and ethical standards in practice.[1] This leads to the question: as a respected and trusted profession, why do so many nurses report being disengaged in their work? An even more important question is why should health care administrators care about nursing engagement? Astute stewards of an organization's financial picture know the answer is money. Disengaged workers cost the US economy $370 billion a year in lost productivity. Additionally, detached nurses cost organizations between 48% and 61% of an employee's annual salary.[2] Costs quickly add up, with health care organizations losing millions of dollars from lost nursing workforce productivity and turnover.

Because each organizational dollar is scrutinized, strategies for engagement remain a high priority for senior leaders in health care. Primary determinants for disengagement surround the ability to meet an employee's basic needs. Basic needs are defined as pairing the right people with the right job, setting clear expectations, and making sure employees have what they need to successfully do their job.[3]

Empowering nurses to have control and ownership of their practice is an effective approach that satisfies requirements for employee engagement. Kramer et al.[4] describe nurse autonomy as 1 of 3 pillars for an engaging work environment. Organizations that set expectation and value around the freedom to make independent decisions specific to nursing practice create a distinguished and engaging work atmosphere.

The transition-to-practice program (TTP) is one example of a nursing workforce initiative that empowers and engages. Nurse leaders who have championed the development of TTPs understand the power these programs have on nursing engagement and use them as an opportunity to demonstrate leadership commitment to their organization's nursing workforce development.

TRANSITION-TO-PRACTICE PROGRAMS
The concept of TTPs have been around for over 30 years. TTPs help new-graduate nurses transition into their new

Figure 1. Why Consider TPP Accreditation?

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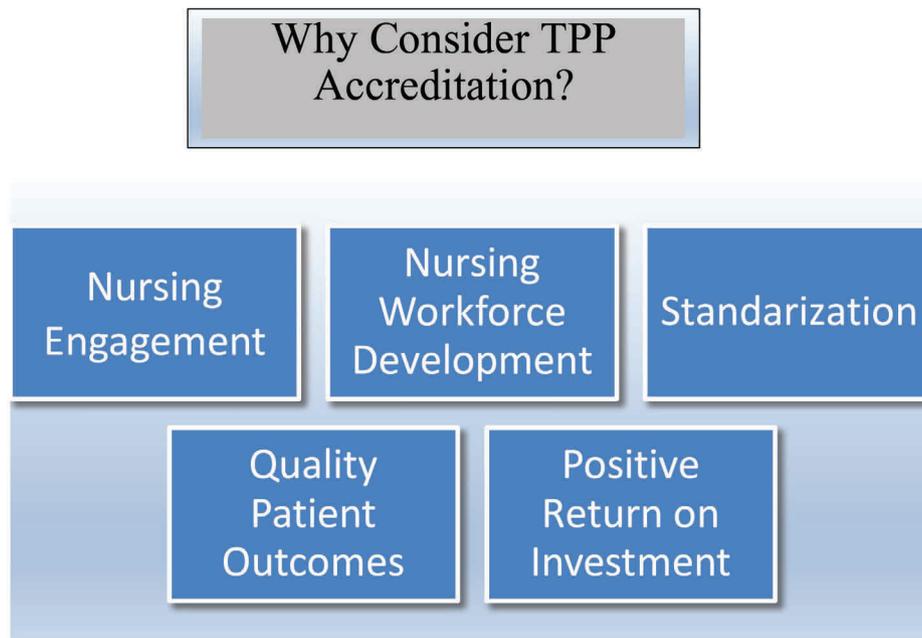
role through time and support from the organization. TTPs are robust programs, many times called residency or fellowship programs. The *Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*[5] report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) called for the implementation of TTPs nationwide. To date, about 48% of hospitals nationally have established TTPs.[6] In a recent update on the report, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine[7] found that TTPs have improved efficiency and retention of nurses; good models exist for organizations to implement; and most TTPs are acute care based. TTPs save organizations money and have been proven to be a positive return on the investment.[8] Robust TTPs increase quality outcomes job satisfaction, and reduce stress.[4] New-graduate nurses who are satisfied with their job are typically more engaged in their organization and profession.

CREATING LEADERS FOR THE FUTURE

TTPs set the foundation for growth of nurse leaders through emphasis on professional development and organizational enculturation. Residents obtain a global view of their role as it relates to achievement of the organization's goals. Post-TTP graduates are confident and have relationships across the organization that support (when ready) exploration of new professional opportunities. Participants in a recent accreditation review I was at shared that most of their professional development specialists as well as the program director were graduates from their new-graduate TTP.

Creating a vision for preceptors brings opportunity to raise precepting standards, develop the preceptor role, and mentor new preceptors. The structure, processes, and tools to support success also serve to engage preceptors. For example, a professional development specialist shared their open-door
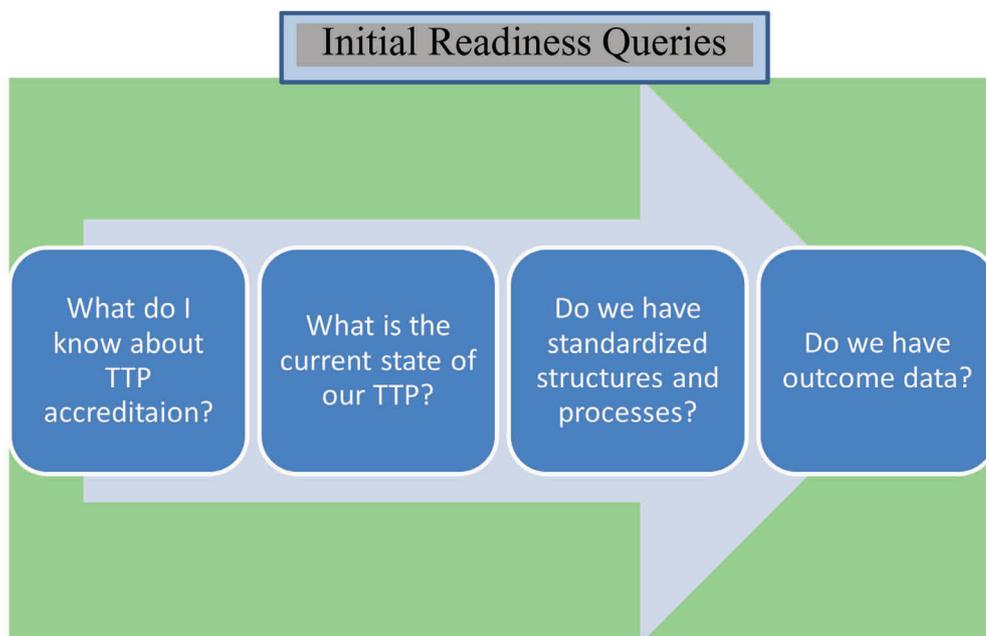
policy and frequent one-to-one coaching with their preceptors. The ability to build relationships between the education department and point-of-care nurses inspired teamwork and communicated valuable insights for future formal learning experiences.

EXCELLENCE AND RECOGNITION OF TPP THROUGH ACCREDITATION

As TTP programs evolve, a virtuous next step for organizations is to seek accreditation of their TTP(s) to demonstrate standardization and quality programing across and between programs. Standardization is important for several reasons (*Figure 1*). First, it provides a consistent framework for competent nursing practice. An example is the clinical utilization of the American Nurses Association (ANA) Scope and Standards of Practice. The ANA Standards of Practice guide the nursing profession's critical thinking and decision-making processes for a minimum level of competence. Nursing recognizes the framework as the nursing process. Second, standardization allows organizations to compare programs outcomes equally between and within organizations and systems. Without standardization of practices and programs, comparisons at a national level would be prohibitive.

In addition to standardization of the structures, processes, and outcomes, accreditation demonstrates to various stakeholders, such as the community, consumers and employees, a level of organizational excellence and commitment. TTP accreditation indicates the organization embraces and upholds the highest standards to successfully support new-graduate nurse hires and the team who coordinate, manage, and evaluate their TTP. The most advantageous benefit is the development of a nursing workforce that delivers safe patient care and achieves quality patient outcomes.

Figure 2. Initial Readiness Queries

Initial Readiness Queries

What do I know about TTP accreditaion?

What is the current state of our TTP?

Do we have standardized structures and processes?

Do we have outcome data?

Currently, 2 national organizations provide accreditation for TTPs: the American Nurses Credentialing Center and the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. Both accrediting organizations use best-practice evidence to establish standards that fulfil 1 of the IOM recommendations made in 2010.

WHERE TO START IN YOUR ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Prior to beginning the accreditation process, nursing leadership should engage in a preliminary assessment of their program to evaluate the current state of their TTP (*Figure 2*).

If nursing leadership identifies through the preliminary assessment that the TTP is fully operational, the organization should explore accreditation. Performing a formal gap analysis will assist the organization in identifying any gaps in the program compared to the accreditation standards. The health care organization can assign the program director to lead the initiative.

A TPP steering committee of key stakeholders, composed of nurses who represent a variety of roles, is usually formed at the inception of the TTP and is a place to jump start the accreditation conversation, introduce the concept of TTP accreditation, and enhance stakeholder buy-in. The TTP steering committee's main objective is to oversee every aspect of the organization's TTP and assume accountability for outcomes. An obvious focus is support, development, and mentorship of the nurse in transition although this holds true for those in cornerstone roles who design, develop, implement and sustain the program. The team's commission necessitates demonstration of leadership, teamwork, collaboration, coaching, and mentoring, and provides opportunity for every team member to grow and develop. This team is instrumental as champions of the accreditation process, assisting the program director with a formal gap

analysis and writing of the accreditation application. The process requires input from all support personnel, including nurse professional development specialists, nurse managers, preceptors, and previous residents.

Furthermore, the accreditation application journey rekindles the positive energy that existed during the initial design, development, and implementation of the TTP. The process lends itself to reflection and critical evaluation of the TTPs structure, process, and outcomes, and verifies they meet the standards and best practices set forth by national accreditation entities.

AN APPRAISER'S POINT OF VIEW

Ronda LaVigne has been an appraiser for the last 2 years, and she has seen firsthand how organizations can garner engagement through accrediting their TTP.

Reflecting on my own experiences provoked thoughts about how leaders must feel about organizational engagement and how this process could help support nurses in their organization. My best advice to applicants is not to be intimidated by the process. Instead, view accreditation as a platform to share your organization's story, build engagement, share your best practices, and celebrate your successes.

After I finished 2 concurrent reviews, I shared my excitement about all the great work both applicants highlighted in their PTAP application with a coworker. I contrasted and compared how one applicant is a large prestigious organization with a specialty residency, and the other is a small rural hospital. Each application had its own charm that generated my enthusiasm about the work the organizations are doing to engage and support new-graduate nurses. Their high level of engagement and pride emanated from their written document and verbal testimony.

The applicants described the fruits of their hard work, and how teamwork and collaboration were foundations for their residency successes. One preceptor described how she was uncomfortable providing negative feedback to a nurse resident. Communication was a key objective in the mandatory preceptor workshop where she learned how to set goals and provide constructive feedback. From her perspective, this was the most valuable part of the training; attributing the opportunity to develop her communication skills to the residency. TTPs serve as a catalyst to enhance preceptor and leadership skills that expand beyond the preceptor role by enriching the level of all professional interactions.

Nursing leadership is also engaged in the TTP. A chief nurse executive recently stated, "I knew we had put in a lot of hard work, but accreditation makes it real; I am so proud of my team." Accreditation generates a process that makes the work of creating and sustaining a residency visible and engaging to the entire organization.

Evaluation outside the organization can reveal overlooked opportunities. One memorable example is a virtual visit with a large academic acute care organization applying for accreditation of their new-graduate nurse TTP. The entire team was in the room together; after introductions, the virtual visit began with the applicant sharing in their own words the inception and evolution of their TTP. The program director and chief nursing officer (CNO) did most of the talking. They spoke about their TTP as if they were 2 best friends out to lunch with an ease and comfort that occurs when people work enthusiastically toward a common goal. The pride was evident. In preparation for the virtual visit, a quick review of the organization's website revealed a tab highlighting the organizations residency programs. To my disappointment, there was no mention of a TTP for nursing; the residency tab spoke only of physician and pharmacy residencies. I asked during the call their thoughts about my findings. An uncomfortable silence came over the call. When broken by the CNO, he calmly stated with a quick laugh, "Well, I can take care of that." We all chuckled, but my take-away was this is an engaged group that wanted the absolute best for their nursing workforce and organization. It was evident that the right people for the right job were in the room.

In other words, there are no set uniform or expected responses to the questions and criteria. There are many roads that can lead to a great outcome. The components of an accreditation application functions as a roadmap to creatively design, implement, and sustain a great residency.

As momentum for accrediting TTPs takes off, I feel energized and filled with ideas from these highly engaged organizations and TTPs. Organizations are doing great work through engagement despite the chaos and uncertainty in health care. It is a true privilege to participate in the reviews of TTPs, and I am honored.

DECLARATION OF ENGAGEMENT
TTP accreditation is hard work but also comes with low hanging fruits. Standardization of structures and processes to the highest ideals takes time and commitment but comes with valuable benefit: nursing engagement. Nursing engagement affects multiple factors: work satisfaction, nursing turnover, and financial solvency. When nurses are engaged, delivery of quality care improves, and every stakeholder is a winner: community, consumer, and employees.

THE FUTURE OF NURSE RESIDENCIES
The concept of new-graduate nurse residencies is now a mainstay in nursing, but what is the future of TTPs? The last decade and a half has focused the nursing profession on the need and value of new-graduate nurse TTPs to the exclusion of other nurses in transition. Organizations need to think beyond new-graduate nurses and establish programs for all nurses in transition, such as RN and advanced practice RN fellowships. Health care reform and payer reimbursement are primary drivers of new provider settings. As new health care environments continue to evolve, and nurses move to unfamiliar practice settings, it is essential for the delivery of safe patient care to have formal TTPs that can demonstrate quality patient outcomes. Seeking accreditation of TTPs continues to grow; hopefully in 10 years, nursing will be able to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of all TTPs. As we look to the future state of TTPs, they should include interprofessional education between all health care professionals. Medicine, pharmacy, and nursing must collaborate to ensure an enhanced experience for all learners.

SUMMARY
Society views nursing as a highly respected profession, scoring the highest on Gallup polls for honest and ethical practice for the last 15 years. Unfortunately, this esteemed score does not translate into high nurse engagement in the workplace. Lack of engagement is costly to organizations because of lost productivity and the potential for increasing turnover rates. Accreditation of TTPs is a tool that can drive nursing engagement, highlight senior leadership commitment to the nursing staff, and recognize hard work. An engaged and satisfied new nurse at an organization can influence an entire workforce by their commitment to an organization. **NL**

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