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Purpose: This study explores the experiences and perceptions of academic nurse mentors supporting early career nurse academics (ECNAs). *Methods*: Interviews were undertaken with mentors following a mentoring partnership with ECNAs. Data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using a process of thematic analysis. *Findings*: Four themes emerged from the data, namely; motivation for mentoring; constructing the relationship; establishing safe boundaries and managing expectations. *Conclusions*: This study provides a unique insight into the experiences of mentoring within the context of an academic leadership programme for nurses. Such insights highlight the issues facing academics from professional disciplines and can inform strategies to support their career development. *Clinical relevance*: A sustainable academic nursing workforce is crucial to ensure that effective preparation of future generations of expert clinical nurses. Therefore, it is important to consider strategies that could strengthen the academic nursing workforce.

Keywords: early career nurse academics; mentoring; mentor; qualitative; professional relationship; collegiality

Introduction

"Mentoring" describes a professional association that aims to develop someone through their relationship with another person who is more experienced (McCloughen, O'Brien, & Jackson, 2009). The benefits of effective mentoring in the tertiary sector include greater recruitment and retention of junior faculty (Louie, Campbell, Donaghy, Rice, & Sabatini, 2011; Nick et al., 2012), prevention of burnout in senior staff, improved teaching and student learning (Gerolamo & Roemer, 2011; Shirey, 2006; Smith & Zsohar, 2007) and increased scholarly output (Louie et al., 2011). Good mentoring enhances both career success and job satisfaction (Chung & Kowalski, 2012; Gerolamo & Roemer, 2011). This is significant as these factors have both been found to influence decisions regarding whether to remain in employment (Tourangeau, Cummings, Cranley, Ferron, & Harvey, 2010). This resonates with previous research which found that academics with mentors have greater socio-emotional support, greater job satisfaction

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and had less intention of leaving the faculty in the immediate future (Wasserstein, Quistberg, & Shea, 2007). However, despite the reported benefits of mentorship for faculty, many nurse academics do not have an identified mentor (Chung & Kowalski, 2012; Gerolamo & Roemer, 2011; Singh, Pilkington, & Patrick, 2014).

Much of the available literature reports perceptions of mentees in terms of ideal mentor attributes, and the availability and effectiveness of mentoring. There is a distinct paucity of literature available that addresses mentoring from the mentors' perspective. This paper provides insights into nurse academic mentors experiences and perceptions of supporting early career nurse academics (ECNAs).

Literature review

There are multiple and varying definitions of mentoring in academia, although it is commonly defined as "a top-down, one to one relationship in which an experienced faculty member guides and supports the career development of a new or early career faculty member" (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007, p. 58). This alludes to the mentoring relationship being unidirectional and altruistic, however, and this is contested by Canter, Kessler, Odar, Aylward, and Roberts (2012) who acknowledge there are multiple reciprocal personal and professional benefits to mentoring relationships. This reciprocal nature is supported by Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, and Wilbanks (2011) who identify the core attributes of mentoring as being "reciprocity, developmental benefits and regular/consistent interaction" over time (p. 292).

The lack of mentorship for new nurse faculty is evident in the literature. In their phenomenological study, Cangelosi (2014) found that although participants were constantly seeking mentorship to assist them in their role development, this support was not forthcoming. Further, research by Singh et al. (2014) found that despite an identified need for mentoring only 44% of academics were in a mentoring relationship, and 49% of participants conveyed they did not receive adequate support to succeed in their roles. Similarly, in an American study by Chung and Kowalski (2012), only 40% of the nursing faculty surveyed reported having a current mentoring relationship. Positive outcomes were evident for those who were mentored in terms of greater job satisfaction (Singh et al., 2014), psychological empowerment and less overall job-related stress (Chung & Kowalski, 2012).

Although mentoring relationships have been found to offer substantial benefits for new nurse faculty, not all mentoring relationships are perceived as beneficial. In some studies up to 25% of participants who were mentored reported low levels of satisfaction with this relationship (Singh et al., 2014). Unsuccessful mentoring can have adverse effects on both individuals and their organisations (Driscoll, Parkes, Tilley-Lubbs, Brill, & Pitts-Bannistera, 2009; Green & Jackson, 2014). The type of relationship and how it is established may also determine whether mentoring is effective. Straus et al. found authoritative relationships to be a barrier to good mentoring. Conversely, Potter and Tolson (2014) advocate for a relationship that comprises respect and remains open to a "shared guided experience that is nurtured" (p. 728).

Assigned mentoring relationships may be problematic due to a lack of shared values or complimentary interpersonal qualities (Jackson et al., 2003; Sambunjak, Straus, & Marusic, 2009; Straus, Chatur, & Taylor, 2009). These concerns are supported by Potter and Tolson (2014) who advocate for mentoring relationships to be matched closely for personality, aspirations and expectations. Further, mentees that are assigned a mentor may feel constrained which may have a negative impact on the relationship (Sambunjak et al., 2009; Straus et al., 2009). This resonates with research that has found that when mentees have autonomy in choosing their mentors,

mentoring relationships are more spontaneous and effective (Jackson et al., 2003; Straus et al., 2009).

While there are multiple views on what comprises effective mentorship, key concepts encompass personal, relational and professional characteristics (Sambunjak et al., 2009). Such characteristics are supported by findings of qualitative work by Eller, Lev, and Feurer (2013) who studied 117 mentor–mentee dyads and Cho, Ramanan, and Felman (2011) who analysed letters of recommendation for 29 faculty members who were recognised for their excellence in academic mentoring. Findings from these studies identified fundamental personal characteristics such as compassion and selflessness, mutual respect and trust, and open communication. Favourable relational characteristics included the provision of individual career guidance, enthusiasm, accessibility, fostering passion and creating inspiration, promoting independence and providing opportunities for collaboration. Professional characteristics identified for effective mentorship included the exchange of knowledge to enhance skill development and role modelling, allowing mentees to pass role model appropriate professional behaviours (Cho et al., 2011; Eller et al., 2013).

There are several barriers to effective mentorship reported in the literature, with the most common barrier being a lack of time invested by both the mentor and mentee (Altuntas, 2012; Cangelosi, 2014; Straus et al., 2009). Further barriers include a shortage of available mentors (Straus et al., 2009), a lack of recognition of the role by institutions, personal characteristics and a lack of knowledge and skills in mentoring (Potter & Tolson, 2014; Sambunjak et al., 2009; Straus et al., 2009).

Aim of the paper

This paper was drawn from a larger study that sought to develop, establish and evaluate a programme to enhance leadership development for ECNAs. Specific aims of the larger project were to:

- Facilitate the transition of ECNAs from novice to confident and effective academics.
- Design a model of leadership development to support ECNAs.
- Investigate the impact of a model of leadership development, involving peer learning networks, academic mentorship and online/facilitated workshops, in promoting scholarly engagement, enhancing self-efficacy, fostering job satisfaction and building leadership capacity across the areas of teaching/learning, governance and research.

One of the elements for the programme was a mentoring programme for new nurse academics. Previous findings from this project reporting new nurse academics perspectives on leadership have been reported elsewhere (Halcomb, et al., 2014). The aim of this current paper is to report the perceptions and insights of academic nurse mentors in establishing mentoring relationships with ECNAs.

Methodological issues

Methods

The larger project was a mixed methods study that sought to develop, implement and evaluate a programme of leadership development for early career nursing academics across two metropolitan universities in Sydney, Australia. Specifically, this programme sought to facilitate the transition of ECNAs from novice to confident and effective academics. Participants were recruited

in early 2011 and then completed a multifaceted leadership programme until February 2013. This leadership programme comprised peer learning networks, academic mentorship and a combination of online and facilitated workshops. Full details of this larger study have been reported elsewhere (Halcomb, et al., 2014). Previous findings from this project reporting new nurse and midwife academics perspectives on leadership have also been reported elsewhere (Halcomb, et al., in press). This current paper seeks to describe the perceptions and insights of experienced academic nurse and midwife mentors in establishing mentoring relationships with ECNAs.

Setting

This project was undertaken within two of major providers of nursing and midwifery education in the Sydney metropolitan area. Each school employed between 70 and 90 full-time equivalent academic staff and over 65 sessional staff to deliver its undergraduate programmes to between 2300 and 3000 students.

Participants

Academic staff employed at the two participating institutions were approached to participate if the met the following inclusion criteria. Individuals were considered to be ECNA if they were employed, permanently, on contract or on a sessional basis, as entry-level academic staff. Additionally, these individuals either held a Ph.D., were currently enrolled in a Ph.D. programme or expressed intent to enrol in a doctoral programme in the near future. Mentors were senior academics from both institutions who were purposively selected by the research team based on their academic career record and willingness to be involve in the mentoring programme. Following an initial workshop, ECNA were encouraged to indicate three preferences for their mentor. The project team then allocated mentors based on these preferences and the mentors' capacity for mentees. Following this process most ECNAs were able to be matched with either their first or second preference.

Data collection

During April 2011–February 2013, 17 mentors met and developed relationships with 26 ECNAs. Of those 17 mentors, 16 agreed to participate in qualitative semi-structured face-to-face interviews. These interviews were undertaken in a private location and conducted by a research assistant who was not previously involved in the study. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service.

Ethical considerations

Approval was gained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at both institutions prior to the commencement of data collection. Given that members of the Project Team were also faculty members at the participating institutions, care was taken to protect the privacy of participants and protect professional relationships. To achieve this, qualitative data were collected by research staff separate to the project team, and the project team only received de-identified data for analysis. Only the project team leader and research staff had access to both the coded data and participant names.

Data analysis

Transcripts were checked by the interviewers to remove identifying data and then analysis was undertaken by two doctorally prepared members of the project team. using a process of thematic analysis (Borbasi & Jackson, 2011).

Findings

Mentors reported they overwhelmingly enjoyed their mentoring opportunity. They had volunteered, or agreed to participate as a mentor after being approached. They were highly motivated to participate, appreciated the relationships that were generated as a result, and were committed to developing and supporting their mentees. All felt that the relationships primarily existed to meet the needs of the mentees. They intended to continue to support and nurture their mentee until such a time as the mentee chose to end the relationships. Detailed findings are presented under the following themes: motivation for mentoring; constructing the relationship; establishing safe boundaries and managing expectations.

Motivation for mentoring

The desire to assist less experienced colleagues was the primary motivator for all participants. These mentoring participants recognised that they held experiences and knowledge, gained over the years of their careers that could be used to enhance the career aspirations of junior colleagues. Our participants overwhelmingly had not had the benefit of mentoring themselves and wanted to ensure the newer generation of nurse academics had a better experience.

> I never got mentored. I never had anybody sit down and say listen, have you decided where you want to go? What do you want to do? (P9)

Some mentoring participants felt they had themselves experienced quite a rocky path within the academic environment, and wanted to share what they had learned with others.

> I see mentoring mainly is for them. I think you mentor because – I was seeing mentoring as more an altruistic thing that you go into that because you want people to have a – I suppose a more efficient, better positive experience in the academic career in this case, academic mentoring … . (P1)

A number of mentors were in the latter years of their own professional careers and so felt that the mentoring opportunity provided them with a strategy to nurture and support others.

> I'm nearing the end of my career and I want to support those who are starting. You know they need to fill my place [laughs] so I like to support others coming up through and give them opportunities that I didn't have. (P9)

Several mentors felt that new nurse academics often lacked a full understanding of the requirements of the academic role, and were motivated to mentor as a way of supporting and helping to care for their new colleagues.

> Because they don't know what they don't know. They just don't know. So having a more rounded idea of what it is to be an academic from day one might be useful, because they only see the teaching and the research and are surprised, shocked and burdened down by the administrivia [sic] once they get thrown the unit coordinator role. (P5)

Like participant five, the other mentoring participants generally took a holistic approach to mentoring and understood the need for staff development in a range of areas, there was also the recognition of the need to develop and enhance leadership skills in new nurse academics. This served as an additional motivation for some mentors, who saw that they had a role to foster leadership in novice nurse academics.

> I think the mentor role is about to some degree developing and nurturing the opportunity to learn to stand as a leader. I think I'm not quite sure what it is that builds confidence to act. So that's why I had to pause and think for a minute, because I'm not sure I even know how you do that. But it is around the confidence to act I think. (P8)

Constructing the relationship

Once they had embarked on the mentoring relationship, our participant mentors needed to construct the relationship, to make it meet the needs of themselves and their mentee. These relationships were characterised by differences in position and seniority, with attendant power differentials. This did cause some initial reserve for some mentees and the participant mentors had to allow time and create an environment to help overcome this reserve.

> When she first came, she was quite overwhelmed, a little bit intimidated by my position, and as that went on, she became more relaxed, she was able to freely discuss things. We were able to laugh and joke about things. She was more open to trying some of her strategies I suggested. I felt that I could see her being more empowered as time went along. The mentoring role changed a little bit from guiding and supporting and educating to actually walking alongside her at the end of the day. (P4)

In planning how they were going to establish their connection with mentees, mentors reflected on and acknowledged the critical importance of earmarked and quarantined time, to allow the relationship to grow and develop.

> The importance of spending time with somebody and having dedicated time just to have those discussions is really important. You can't have them in the corridor, it can't be – that's the problem I think with the informal, is that it does become a time out, you know, let's take time out now to sit and talk about just this. This is your time to talk with me about what things are for you. (P5)

Participants also had to consider whether they should have regular scheduled meetings, ad hoc meetings, or a mix of both. Some participants took a flexible stance on this, depending on the needs and preferences of their mentees.

> We met face-to-face, probably six or seven times over the duration, more informally as well but they [the six or seven] were the formal meetings that we had. (P16)

There were also decisions to be made about whether to hold the meetings in the mentor office, or in a more casual, less formal environment such as a coffee shop. For some of those that chose to have the meetings in their offices, while this worked well, some felt it was too formal and in hindsight they felt that meeting in a café environment (or similar) may have been better. However, similarly, those choosing to meet in coffee shops felt that the office environment may have helped to keep things as focused as possible.

> We organised to have the meetings in a coffee shop. It might be better if it's actually quite formal and it's in an office … So there are – so it's more of the business rather than a friendship meeting. (P7)

In managing the actual meetings, mentors tended to try to keep the relationship as professionally focused as possible, albeit that some reported mentees wishing to talk about personal or family issues. Ideally, there was the desire to try to get their mentee to take a "bigger picture" view, to consider where they wanted to be and what they wanted to achieve over time.

> I was looking at it as mentoring for a career goal. That is where did she want to see herself in five years' time and work towards that and also whether there was anything now currently that I could do to support her. Her main concerns were in the moment. They were not thinking ahead five years. (P9)

Rather than being concerned with the future, most of the mentors reported that the ECNAs were burdened with the here-and-now; they were seeking guidance and advice on practical issues that were causing difficulties.

> She [mentee] has come to me and just sought advice about managing a difficult situation … I've sort of used that as one of those things as a mentor to sort of say, well, what did you do, and we talked about that, and how would you do it differently next time? Do you think it worked well? So I saw that as my role as a mentor, it was to – almost at every discussion hope at the end of it there was something she took away from that that she could then use. (P3)

Reflecting on their framing of the relationship, participants provided a range of insights. While all were able to talk about the friendship elements of mentoring, all were also able to delineate mentoring as being something different from friendship. Participant 14 viewed it as a form of professional friendship. Elaborating on this idea she commented,

> It's mateship more than anything else. It's like, welcome to my world … . It's like a professional bond between you and you are inviting that person to become a part of that. Use the jargon and the language and the colloquialisms that all go together with that mateship bond. (P14)

Establishing safe boundaries

As experienced senior academic nurses, all participants had positional seniority over the new nurse academics, with attendant power issues. Thus, participants were conscious of the need to establish and maintain clear boundaries. There were potential boundary issues that occurred within the relationship, between the partners, in terms of their interaction – the nature, frequency and manner of communication, and also in a wider sense because of potential competing work-based relationships.

> Boundaries are necessary in any relationship whether it's a professional relationship or a personal relationship, but I certainly didn't set boundaries in the first meeting. But I did ask them about their expectations and conveyed what my expectations were too … Boundaries in terms of whether it crosses over into personal, because that's often where I think – I didn't have any problem with that … I didn't set any boundaries to start with. (P2)

Participants were conscious of the necessity of ensuring that they were at all times considered the needs and interests of their mentees when recommending activities and opportunities. Participant six highlighted that to ensure this, she actively engaged in reflective processes.

> There is self-reflection because sometimes what you might put to the person as an opportunity and the – is that the right thing for them? Have you set them up to fail? So yeah, that very much that reflecting on what you've done, why are you doing it, is it in the best interests of the person? Very much the

focus of the self-reflection that I have … Particularly – so there's two areas, there's the personal and there's the professional. They interrelate and cross over. How much you buy into the personal and that requires I think some reflection as well. So yeah, I think self-reflection is a part of it. (P6)

As revealed by participant six, the mentors were also conscious of the vulnerability of their mentees in relation to the disclosure of personal information within the relationship.

Because I suppose ethically about people whether – what they could feel safe in telling me and what I could feel safe knowing, and how it might or might not influence – I'd have to be really clear about what information I knew, how did I know that information, and how does it or doesn't it impact on any decision that might be made at a department level. (P3)

Some mentors acted to protect their mentees in this regard by establishing very firm boundaries that precluded any discussion other than academic career planning and strategy.

This [mentoring] is about the academic career. Although we've never sort of spell it out but discussion definitely was around that. We don't discuss anything beyond that … (P1)

For some mentors there was a need to establish boundaries in response to unreasonable demands for time and attention.

We also kept in contact frequently by phone, in fact initially it was quite too frequently for my liking but that was part of the learning process of being able to set boundaries and not to make her feel so comfortable that she could ring me any time, day, evening … initially she was very needy and quite demanding but I think as time progressed and I did set boundaries and we did have a couple of discussions about autonomy and being responsible and me being more as a guide or a mentor than someone that would answer every question she had. (P16)

Participant 16 responded to this situation sensitively, drawing on strategies that could empower, rather than discourage her mentor.

I didn't want to say look, you're too needy, you can't really come out and say that. So, in general conversation, I would just say oh yes, but I won't be available all the time for you, so these are the strategies that we can put in place to actually make sure that you can work through this on your own without me here … She finally calmed down. (P16)

In reflecting on her success in helping the mentee to understand the boundaries that contribute to healthier, more independent and respectful professional relationships, participant 16 also acknowledged that these on-going mentoring relationships were developmental and had the capacity to mature over time.

I think it's an ongoing process and I think for someone – the more comfortable they feel with you, the more comfortable they are in calling you for crisis and things like that. But it is more about when she contacts me outside formal meetings now, it is more when she feels that it is a crisis, rather than just wanting me to solve every little issue. (P16)

The mentors held senior positions in their institutions, and some of these mentors also held work-based supervision or line manager responsibility for the ECNAs. This created a potential for competing work-based relationships to occur. While all attempts were made to not have people enter into mentoring relationships with people they were in pre-existing line manager relationships, sometimes the mentees chose this. While participants stepped up and accepted

this role, this raised some issues for them in relation to keeping boundaries between their competing roles.

> I would have to say that I don't think in my current role it is particularly easy for me to be a mentor, a formal mentor, or to have mentees. … whether it blurred the boundaries a little bit about, well, when was I giving her performance development that was about me as a supervisor as opposed to mentoring, and having a hat on saying, I'm here, it doesn't matter what your performance is, I'm here to just talk about what your future might be. (P3)

This was a particularly fraught issue for those participants affected by competing relationships. This tension in some instances shaped the things that could be stated and the things that remained unspoken.

> My question to her as a mentor, if I wasn't her supervisor, could've been things like, okay, you know, you've had your child now, in terms of your progression as a career, when did you think you might restart your PhD? But as an academic supervisor, because of carer responsibilities, I'd have to be very careful how I framed that question to somebody I was supervising … So that absolutely got in the way of having those discussions. (P3)

Participants had clear insights into the potential for conflict between the roles. They recognised the potential for blurred boundaries between the roles and had to monitor themselves; to engage in on-going reflection about how best to manage the tensions.

> There was a sort of a conflict between – not a conflict, it's a tension maybe – between mentor and workload supervisor … that tension between workload supervisor and mentor, I thought was a bit – was evident to me. (P5)

One of the main issues of concern was the idea that a line manager may have more immediate needs and concerns that could influence their advice to a mentee.

> I think there's a conflict of interest there if you're being mentored by a line manager because they have different responsibilities and even though it might be inadvertent, they may not always have your best interests at heart, they're not actually looking, perhaps to develop you. They may be looking more short-term about they need someone to do this workload, rather than support someone to further their career and develop. (P16)

In considering mentoring in relation to the line manager role, participant 15 articulated this

> I think it's about helping the person move to where they want to be and that might be out of the organisation or it might be – so I think often the workload supervisors are thinking about this is what you're going to do this year, this is what you're going to teach, this is what you're going to do et cetera but I'm not always sure that they provide people with stretch goals about, this is where you want to be now but you really need to start thinking about where you want to be in five years, where you want to be in two years. (P15)

Managing expectations

When creating these relationships, participants were aware of the need to manage expectations. Several participants found that, as their mentoring relationships were being established, their mentees did not seem to have clear understandings of what was expected from them. With hindsight, mentors realised there was a need to be very clear from the beginning about the expectations they had. In contemplating the creation of possible future mentoring relationships, participant three commented:

> I'd be much clearer about expectations and I'd say upfront that if you're going to enter this relation-
> ship … I expect you to commit to making time to meet with me, and it would be on a regular basis. …
> we've got to put aside dedicated time to focus on you – absolutely, I would approach it that way next
> time. (P3)

Expectations in relation to time were particularly important. Participants expected that mentors would be proactive in regards to making time for this new relationship. Where there was a lack of understanding of the time-based expectations, this could be viewed as a lack of commitment to the relationship.

> I think there needs to be commitment on both sides, so that was one of mine in that I'm very happy to
> be – in fact, I really wanted to participate and feel that I have something that I could contribute as a
> mentor, but at the same time, I didn't want to be chasing all the time. … I think that they need to also
> be available too, so it shouldn't always be me chasing. (P2)

Participant 16 had experienced some initial challenges in establishing her mentor relationship. Her mentee sought very frequent contact and in contemplating possible contributing factors, participant 16 considered that these beginning difficulties arose from a lack of shared understandings.

> … I think it may have stemmed from a lack of understanding of what a mentor is, as well as – it could
> have been just uncertainty and some of it was ambition, in a hurry to get somewhere as well and can I
> have it all on a plate now please, type of attitude. But I think a lot of it stemmed from what they could
> expect, a lack of understanding of what they could expect from their mentor. (P16)

Discussion

The importance of ensuring a sustainable academic workforce for nursing is well-recognised (McDermid, Peters, Jackson, & Daly, 2012); as are the challenges associated with this (Jackson, Peters, Andrew, Salamonson, & Halcomb, 2011). The period of transition from clinical to the academic environment can be a time of stress and difficulty for ECNA (McDermid, Peters, Daly, & Jackson, 2013). Mentorship is considered to be an influential means of successfully developing ECNA and supporting their efficacious transition into academic life (Dunham-Taylor, Lynn, Moore, McDaniel, & Walker, 2008). Indeed, mentorship can be seen as critical for the development of a successful academic career (Dunham-Taylor et al., 2008). Undertaking academic mentorship requires deep insight into and vision about the academic role, as well as high-level skills in managing meetings and developing professional relationships to prepare ECNAs for academic leadership in nursing academia. Like other studies (Ewing et al., 2008), mentors from this study intended to continue to support the mentees beyond the completion of the project.

Like all relationships, mentoring requires two partners – a mentor and a mentee and while the benefits of successful mentoring to ECNA and academic departments may be evident, the benefits for the mentor are less palpable. Indeed, for the mentor, such a relationship involves a commitment and investment of time and energy that may generate very little return, and indeed can leave them open to negative scrutiny and criticism (Green & Jackson, 2014). While there is some considerable literature on the characteristics and qualities of nurse mentors (McCloughen, O'Brien, & Jackson, 2010, 2011) there is rather less that focuses on the experiences and motivating factors. In this current study, the motivation for undertaking mentorship was described explicitly or implicitly as an altruistic activity with mentors seeking to support the development of the next generation of academic leaders for the nursing profession. Mentors in the study indicated they had generally not been mentored themselves early in their academic careers and

generously gave time to support the ECNA participants, with the anticipation of making their transition into the academic setting experience better.

Approaches to mentorship vary in their intent and design (Burlew, 1991; Dawson, 2014; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007). In this project, mentors were provided with information about the aims and intent of the project, and opportunities for individual and group discussions with the research team were provided. However, they were encouraged to pursue their own mentoring style and drew on well-considered mentoring elements (Dawson, 2014). Mentors indicated assisting mentees develop an understanding about the academic role and nurturing them in the development and management of the requisite teaching, research and leadership skills required for role. In addition to a focus on mentees current role, mentors also sought to encourage mentees to consider their future careers, including the requirements for the development of leadership skills required for career development in academia.

Mentors described how they approached the development of a relationship with a mentee from the addressing of pragmatic issues such as how often and where to meet and to issues such as how to establish boundaries with participants and consider power differences between the mentor and participants. Mentorship requires a skilled undertaking with mentors describing how what might be viewed as a simple decision – where to hold a meeting- can bring challenges when trying to balance issues such as formality and informality in the mentoring relationship. Ewing et al. (2008) suggest that reaching a consensus is important in the mentoring relationship and the mentors in our study described how they achieved a balance of formal and informal meetings during the progress of the project. Regular meetings are necessary as time constraints can impede the effectiveness of mentoring (Ewing et al., 2008). The establishment of regular time to meet and establishing goals were described as part of the construction of the mentorship relationship with mentees. Goals are necessary for providing guidance and structure to the mentoring process (Hayes & Koro-Ljungberg, 2011).

Through these findings mentors reveal the skills they employed to manage meetings, and keep them professionally focused. They described their relationship with mentees as developing into to a type of "professional friendship" which constitute elements of friendship including having a laugh and joke but with the establishment of the boundary of discussion around work-related topics. In this study, mentors were highly experienced academics and held leadership positions. This experience was crucial in enabling mentors to adhere to the professional aspects of the mentoring role and goals of the study as the relationship between the mentor and participant developed, as expected, over time (Hayes & Koro-Ljungberg, 2011).

Mentoring is an important way of providing career support for new academics (Adcroft & Taylor, 2009). Career support for leadership and research must be integrated into institutions if academics are to be retained in the academic setting (Adcroft & Taylor, 2009; Butterworth et al., 2005). Supportive interventions such as mentoring have many potential benefits, and to enable academics to develop their full potential in the academic setting. Our study provides understanding around the mentoring role for the mentor including the challenges involved with the role and resonate with Dawson's (2014) suggestion that research must advance "beyond generically defining mentoring toward concisely specifying it" (p. 144).

Strengths and limitations

A key strength of this study is the contribution to an understanding of the need for a programme of mentoring for ECNAs. Analysis of the views of the mentors revealed a keen desire for them to be instrumental and influential in preparing the next generation of nurse and midwife academics. An additional strength was the engagement of the mentors and their commitment to supporting new academics and this bodes well for future mentoring programmes. Study limitations include the

small number of mentors engaged in this project from two tertiary institutions. Additionally, we did not explore mentors prior knowledge of mentoring so their views may have been formed from previous experience in their own mentee/mentor relationships. Whilst an initial development workshop for mentors was held at the commencement of this project, not all mentors were able to participate so it is likely that mentors entered their mentoring relationships with differing levels of expertise and this would have therefore influenced their views. Despite several attempts it was not possible to hold a meeting of all mentors to provide an opportunity for discussion and support.

Conclusions

With ageing of the current nursing and midwifery academic workforce renewal of this group will continue and is likely to increase. A strong workforce of nursing and midwifery academics is key to ensuring that nursing and midwifery students are provided with the best possible education in order to meet the needs of our health system. These new academics require thoughtful and engaged leadership from those who have this experience and this study identified that mentoring provides such an opportunity. The commitment of the mentors to support new academics was evident and their experiences reveal the positive outcomes of such support for both mentees and also for the mentors themselves. This study demonstrates a need to ensure that a formal system of support is in place as many of the mentors identified that they did not receive such an opportunity for mentorship in their early careers though they would have benefited from this. New nurse academics are frequently challenged with the move from the clinical workplace to the academic one and there is a need to provide a range of supports. Findings reported in this paper provide clear guidance as to the importance of mentoring and the benefits of senior academic leaders engaging with new academics and mentoring them during this transition period.

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