Report on the National Congress on the State of the Science in Nursing Research

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Background Information
The State of the Science Congress is held in Washington, DC, every two years. The 2006 meeting focused on the theme of “Nursing Research — Improving Life: Development and Dissemination of Nursing Innovation.” This biennial event provides an opportunity for nurse scientist to dialogue about current research in nursing and health care. Developing nurse scientist have the opportunity to network, build their research skills, and, during keynote presentations, to hear from some of the best researchers in the discipline.

2006 State of the Science Congress
The Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science, an open member council of the American Academy of Nursing, co-sponsored this research meeting with the National Institute of Nursing Research. Highlighting this years program were speakers, presenters, and sessions that included:
- Keynote Session by Nancy Fugate Woods, PhD, RN, FAAN, on Applied Genetics and the Study of Women’s Health.
- General Sessions on Multi-site Clinical Trials.
- Invited Symposia on Science in a Post Modern World and Technological Innovations, among others.
- Endnote Session by Antonia Villarruel, PhD, RN, FAAN, on Community-based Participatory Research.

More than 300 oral and poster presentations of current research were offered over the 3-day period, with representation from diverse clinical backgrounds and across many areas of inquiry. In addition to individual podium, symposia and poster sessions, the congress offered point/counter-point discussion, invited plenary and panel sessions, and state of the science symposia by some of the most senior investigators in nursing. Special sessions included roundtable breakfasts with editors of major nursing research journals and opportunities to meet with funding agency consultants. The objective of the State of the Science Congress included: Create a national forum for communicating emerging innovations in nursing science related to nursing practice; disseminate research findings that can influence practice, education, research, and health care policies; and, influence the nursing research agenda of the future.

Work Presented
I had the opportunity to make two presentations, each one as a part of a research symposium, which I will briefly describe. The first presentation, Creating Productive Inter-institutional Research Mentoring Relationships, was part of a symposium, Building Human Research Capacity. It described the developmental process, structural components, and professional outcomes of a formalized inter-institutional mentoring relationship that had been maintained through two funded research projects over a four-year period. Inter-institutional mentoring can facilitate researcher development when a novice researcher works in a relatively small department with little opportunity for mentoring. Mentors are defined as more experienced individuals who have the expertise and personal characteristics to provide advice and support to less experienced individuals (protégés). Six activities that facilitate the mentoring relationship include: affirm, motivate, evaluate, create networks, role model, and develop leadership. With a good match, the mentoring relationship will evolve through a number of stages and last several years.

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The focus of this mentoring relationship was researcher development within the structure of a regional research network. The mentoring process was facilitated by the use of technology, enhancement of professional networks, collaborative project activities, cooperative scholarship dissemination, and regular meaningful face-to-face contact. Various approaches were used to maintain the relationship, such as teleconferencing, electronic mail, face-to-face visits, and conference attendance. The key to making this relationship work was having a commitment to the process and a clear plan for structured and regular contact. Mentoring relationships can be valuable and effective, especially in situations without the expertise, resources, or opportunities for full mentorship. Though many mentoring relationships are spontaneous, implementation of formalized structure increases the potential for meaningful scholarship and leadership outcomes. Inter-institutional mentoring relationships can help novice researchers without adequate institutional resources to achieve their highest potential, and for that reason, they can have a profound effect on the mentor, the protégé, the network group, and the profession.

The second presentation, Working with Research Teams: Holding One's True Course in Changing Times, was part of a symposium, Rural Research: Lessons Learned from the Field. It described the utilization of the process theory of relationship ending (Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002) to analyze a situation in which a research team diverged into distinct and separate areas of interest and described how the team used the model to manage the facilitation of team dissolution. For effective management of research teams, principal investigators should not only know how to create a team, but also how to end one. Despite the fact that team research is now generally accepted and encouraged, there is little in the nursing and research literature that addresses the process of terminating research teams. Halinen and Tahtinen's model, originally developed to analyze business relationships, provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of the process of ending the relationship of a research team.

The process theory of relationship ending provided a framework for understanding how an existing relationship becomes a dissolved one and what influences that process. First, three basic areas were explored: 1) type of relationship, 2) factors influencing ending, and, 3) stages in the relationship ending process. Predisposing, precipitating, and attenuating factors were identified from the perspective of task, actor, dyad, and network-related influences. The ending process was further explored by utilizing the model's stages of ending, which identifies activities undertaken and decisions made by the actors involved within the context of the process. These stages include the following: assessment, decision-making, dyadic communication, disengagement, aftermath, and network communication. The process of ending disconnects former research partners from each other by cutting activity links, resource ties, and actor bonds that have kept them together. The actors set the direction for the process on the basis of their own evaluation. Even if the relationship ending is unwanted, something good may come out of it. The utilization of a framework for process analysis has the potential to facilitate an ideal occasion to turn the event into a useful learning experience for the whole team. There is often as much to learn from failures as from success.

Appreciation

I appreciate the support received from the Red Cross Hiroshima College of Nursing to attend this research meeting. It was a unique opportunity to spend time with senior scientists, to network with international researchers, to learn about the current state of the science in nursing, and to continue to develop research knowledge. Additionally, I was able to spend meaningful time with my research mentor, Clarann Weinert, SC, PhD, RN, FAAN, Professor and Senior Scientist, Montana State University.

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