Adjunct Clinical Nursing Faculty Perceptions of Common Onboarding Practices

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The current nursing faculty shortage is an obstacle to educating new registered nurses in the US. Employing adjunct clinical instructors is an important strategy for supplementing the limited pool of full-time nursing faculty. Clinical adjuncts are unique as they teach in health care settings separated from the parent institution and traditional teaching support. This puts them at risk for poor organizational engagement and limits their professional development. The organizational socialization literature reveals that onboarding (orientation and engagement) strategies which facilitate adjustment of new hires contribute to employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention. Nursing programs often do not provide a comprehensive onboarding process for clinical adjuncts due to a lack of time, limited resources, or competing priorities.

**Purpose:** This qualitative study examined the onboarding needs of adjunct clinical nursing faculty. These needs have not been well-identified in the literature.

**Methods:** Eight clinical adjuncts with less than two years in their current positions were recruited from three urban universities. Four were novice (≤1 yr) educators and four were experienced (≥5 yr). Semi-structured interviews were conducted using the Inform-Welcome-Guide Onboarding Activities Checklist of best and common employee onboarding practices. Each participant rated and discussed the benefit of all practices whether or not they were part of his or her onboarding experience.

**Results:** Participants identified the greatest benefit from Inform (orientation to program, learning management system, and web resources, shadowing and training, etc.) and Guide (mentoring, peer support, contact person) onboarding practices. Welcome practices (meeting with dean, invitation to meetings, welcoming event, etc.) were viewed as less beneficial and purely social practices rated lowest. Although Welcome practices were rated less beneficial a recurrent theme was that the adjuncts felt unwelcomed. They believed the way they were treated during the onboarding process influenced feelings of belonging more than the presence or absence of specific Welcome practices. Adjuncts who experienced more onboarding practices reported greater job satisfaction and institutional allegiance.

**Conclusions and Recommendations:** The Inform-Welcome-Guide framework in the Onboarding Activities Checklist was well received by the participants. Their responses indicated nursing programs need onboarding processes that are efficient, promote role adjustment, and convey to adjuncts that they are a valued part of the organization. If this leads to retention of satisfied faculty then institutional costs are decreased and students benefit from being taught by experienced instructors. While the Checklist was adapted for this study, further refinement is necessary to focus on the language of nursing education and the needs of clinical adjuncts.

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