

**Advanced Practice Nurses' Preparation: Transitioning from Clinical Practice to Academia:
A Scoping Review**

Biographical Sketch

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Abstract

Aim: This review sought to understand what is known in the existing literature about the preparation of APRNs when transitioning from clinical practice to the online/hybrid academic setting.

Background: With the looming shortage of qualified nursing faculty and decreasing nursing workforce, it is essential to investigate how Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) can fill this gap and what can support the APRN transition into the online/hybrid academic setting.

Methods: A scoping review was completed using the framework outlined by Arksey and O'Malley and guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR).

Results: The titles and abstracts of 3,287 publications were screened for inclusion, and 11 articles underwent full-text review. No articles answered the review question.

Conclusions: An empty review provides direction for future research. Research about the APRN transition from clinical practice to the online/hybrid academic setting is warranted.

Key Words: *advanced practice nurses; nurse practitioners; faculty; professors; academia; role transition.*

Background

There are currently 4.3 million nurses practicing nationwide; even with this impressive number, the current state of nursing is experiencing a crisis (American Nurses Association [ANA], n.d.). It is projected that between 2020 and 2030, there will be 194,500 open nursing positions annually. The number of vacant nursing positions supersedes the number of current nursing student enrollments (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2023). The inability to fill these positions is related to various contributing factors, such as decreasing nursing school enrollment, decreasing qualified nursing faculty, nurses leaving the profession for other careers, and retirement, with approximately 20% of the nursing population approaching retirement age (ANA, n.d.; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.).

It is estimated that approximately 23,189 nurse educators are teaching in the United States (US) (ZIPPIA, 2021). This number of nurse educators is insufficient to address the gaps, and the looming faculty shortage of doctoral or master's prepared nurses will only compound the problem, thus impacting the provision of quality nursing education. The mass retirement boom is expected to continue over the next several years and further strain our educational system. The average age of doctoral-prepared nurse educators is 56.6, with masters prepared averaging 48.6 (American Association of College of Nursing [AACN], 2022). In addition to the aging faculty population, the pool of qualified graduate-level prepared nurses has also decreased, affecting the academic institution's ability to hire qualified faculty and requiring many institutions to decrease their seat capacity and turn away qualified students. Despite the decreasing enrollment, more than "66,000 entry-level, 1,239 Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN-BSN), 5,907 Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) 4,583 Doctor in Nursing Practice (DNP), and 201 Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) applicants were turned away in 2021" (American Association of

College of Nursing [AACN], 2022). The decreasing faculty pool of qualified nurse educators has attracted the attention of nursing governing organizations, and active initiatives are currently underway to address the problem. More effort must be put into identifying barriers to practicing as an educator to build and strengthen the nursing workforce. This includes building programs to assist nurses and APRNs in transitioning from clinical practice to faculty roles and taking active steps to prepare other nursing specialty tracks to hold academic roles.

The Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) clinician is uniquely positioned to help bridge the faculty shortage gap. Collectively, there are more than 415,000 APRNs who have a master's or doctorate (American College of Nurse-Midwives [ACNM], 2023; American Association of Nurse Practitioners [AANP], 2022; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022a; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022b).

Four pillars comprise the APRN specialty practice focus: the Certified Nurse Practitioner (CNP), Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS), Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM), and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA). The CNP is the largest number of practicing APRN specialties, with an estimated 385,000 practicing in the U.S., 70% as Family Nurse Practitioners (FNP) (AANP, 2022). Each practice pillar has discretely different governing organizational bodies that set the standards for the curriculum plans. Historically, the advanced practice registered nurse's education is highly focused on their specialty practice areas. A random analysis was completed to investigate three FNP programs, examining their course catalog and curriculum pathways. No specific curriculum focused on helping APRNs transition from clinician to educator roles. The nursing programs primarily focused on the three "Ps," Pharmacology: Physical assessment, advanced Pathophysiology, research, evidence-based practice, quality and safety, leadership and management, ethics and policy role development,

community and population health, courses specific to their area of focus and capstone-clinical integration. Of note, in reviewing the different course catalogs, one school did offer a course that focused on clinical teaching for the health professions. However, that course was not on the curriculum plan for the advanced practice registered nurse and was only focused on clinical teaching skills. Because of the various curricula and focus on building safe and competent advanced practiced clinical providers, there is little to no pedagogical didactic focus to help them practice leveraging their teaching roles- leaving many masters and doctoral-prepared APRNs at a disadvantage if they transition into the academic sector. Many APRNs hold mentorship positions and take on student APRNs for their clinical experiences. They guide undergraduate students during clinical rotations and transition to face-to-face and online academic settings. They shift into these roles with minimal theoretical framework or academic foundation to guide their academic practice.

The concept of role transition is not unknown. Throughout the years, research has been conducted to examine the lived experience of novice nurse practitioners in clinical roles (Faraz, 2017; Urbanowicz, 2021). The research community has also focused on the role transition of the registered nurse into the academic setting, with most studies focusing on face-to-face rather than online or hybrid settings (Cooley & De Gagne, 2016; Robert et al., 2013).

There are many briefings and articles with tips on how to ease the transition, as well as blogs and YouTube videos about the topic, but there is no specific focus for the APRN on their transition to an online or online/hybrid academic program. Aside from the clinical practice differences, the APRN can practice independently or under some supervision (depending on the state regulations), diagnose, prescribe treatments, and order labs and tests following the same duties as physician counterparts. In addition to these descriptive attributes, another prominent

difference between practicing as a registered nurse versus being an advanced practice registered nurse is a change in the thought pattern in how you approach caring for your patient and managing the environment around you. Reframing how you approach clinical management can be problematic in the earlier stages of practice. Once this reframing has occurred, it could set a precedent for later transitions into other roles. This reframing of thought could play a role when transitioning into the academic realm. Therefore, looking into the advanced practice registered nurse's transition into the academic realm is essential.

Over the last several years there has been a surge in online academic learning opportunities. The unique challenges of preparing faculty for this pedagogical approach come with the emergence of online and hybrid learning platforms. Facilitating in the online environment does require unconventional and different techniques. The online learning environment is often student-centric, requiring students to use an active learning approach. Faculty preparing themselves for this role do need to take specific steps to learn the best practices for supporting the student experience. Many advanced practice registered nurses hold adjunct faculty and full-time positions, entering these roles with little to no experience. Because of the advanced practice registered nurses' uniqueness, their prior curriculum upbringing, and mind frame transition into their clinical provider role, it is necessary to explore what research has been conducted on how the advanced practice registered nurse is prepared to transition into the online academic setting.

Purpose

The purpose of this scoping review was to identify what was known in the existing peer-reviewed research about the preparation of APRNs when transitioning from clinical practice to the online/hybrid academic setting. The authors anticipated learning more about the lived

experience of APRNs during their transition into the online/hybrid academic setting. Additionally, it was anticipated to identify what barriers APRNs met during this role transition, the preparation they received for this transition, and what areas could be improved or developed to assist future APRNs in making this transition.

Methods

This scoping review was guided by the framework outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and included the following steps: 1. Identify the research question; 2. Identify relevant studies; 3. Select studies; 4. Chart the data; and 5. Organize, summarize, and report the results. Additionally, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) was used to increase study transparency and reproducibility (Tricco et al., 2015).

To identify relevant studies, a comprehensive search for research regarding the advanced practice nurses' preparation when transitioning from clinical practice to the online academic setting was conducted by a university librarian using the following databases: MEDLINE via PubMed, CINAHL, ProQuest Nursing and Allied Health Literature, and ProQuest Education Database from January 2013 until July 2023. The search strategy included keywords and subject terms for *advanced practice nurses, nurse practitioners, faculty, professors, academia, and role transition*. Each literature search's specific terms and syntax are detailed in Supplemental Digital Content. Reference lists of identified articles were also reviewed for relevant studies and included for screening. The reference lists of all reviewed articles were hand-searched for potentially appropriate articles.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included in the review if they met the following criteria: 1. Reported original findings of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research involving advanced practice registered nurses. 2. Analyzed, evaluated, or discussed the professional transition from clinical practice to an online/hybrid academic role. 3. Published within peer-reviewed journals in the English language within the past ten years. Articles were excluded if they were non-research, dissertations, grey literature, or quality improvement projects.

Procedure

The initial database searches resulted in 4,387 records, of which 1,113 duplicate records were excluded, resulting in 3,274 records for title and abstract screening. An additional 13 articles were identified through hand-searching and included in the title and abstract screening process, producing 3,287 initial records. The first, second, and fourth authors independently evaluated the titles and abstracts of retrieved records using a digital organizational database. After a blinded review, the research team met to discuss any discrepancies and reach consensus. Consensus was obtained by reviewing and discussing individual articles, considering the established inclusion criteria. The authors completed a blinded full-text review of articles, again meeting to discuss discrepancies and reach a consensus.

Results

The authors screened the titles and abstracts of 3,287 publications for potential inclusion, of which 11 articles were selected for full-text review. It was determined that none of the articles answered the review question; thus, this was deemed an empty review. The publications excluded from the full-text review were either the wrong publication type ($n=3$), the wrong population ($n=7$), or the wrong outcome ($n=1$). The 11 full-text articles were either non-research

or non-peer-reviewed, not inclusive of APRNs, or did not focus on transitioning from clinical practice to online/hybrid academia.

Discussion

While the results generated from this review were not anticipated, and empty reviews are not commonly found in the nursing literature, an empty review can still provide value in highlighting a knowledge gap (Gray, 2021; Jena, 2017; Slyer, 2016). With the current state of nursing education experiencing decreasing enrollment and shortages of qualified nursing faculty along with the conjoining increasing healthcare nursing vacancies, it is necessary to continue to think outside of the box, to brainstorm strategies that will further improve faculty competency and increase faculty numbers to support producing a robust nursing workforce (AACN, 2022; AACN, 2023). The appraised articles evaluated for this scoping review were qualitative phenomenological studies or information-only articles focused on clinical nurses (staff nurses), physician assistants, and allied health professionals. Many of the studies did not share the degree levels of the participants or did not specifically focus on the needs of the practicing advanced practice registered nurse. One study examined the lived experiences of how academic orientation would encourage nurses to stay in their roles as academic educators (Cranford, 2013). In contrast, others investigated strategies universities could implement to retain faculty (McQuilkin et al., 202). One notable theme identified is that schools that offered orientation and mentoring programs could improve the transition into academic practice (Cranford, 2013; Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; McQuilkin et al., 2020).

Though the articles and studies investigate nurses' lived experiences, it is necessary to focus on the advanced practice registered nurse to understand their experiences and unique needs better. It is important to understand what impacts their decision to enter academia and learn more

about how they can be supported during their transition. Transitioning from independent practice, which requires high-level critical thinking and full autonomy, could impact their transition into the teaching culture.

Advanced practice registered nurses are in a strategic position to fill the roles of the growing online/hybrid nursing programs. With their higher level of education, clinical expertise, and work-practice autonomy, more research should be done to understand the unique needs of APRN clinicians to help them transition into the online/hybrid educator role. It is necessary to understand their lived experiences and struggles as they transitioned and what could be done to improve their competencies to step into their new roles before entering an academic career. Given the lack of didactic coverage in the APRN's master's degree preparation, one solution could be to better weave educational theories and concepts within their master's curriculum. This could prove highly valuable to the master's prepared APRN, and these lessons could extend to their mentoring and precepting roles, which precede the transition into academic facilitation for many.

Implications for Nursing Education

Considering the projection that one-third of nursing faculty plan to retire by 2025 and more nursing students are opting for online degree programs (AACN, 2022; Page et al., 2023), evidence-based strategies to adequately prepare APRNs for a successful transition from clinical practice to online/hybrid academia are needed. It is important for APRNs who make this career transition be successful so that faculty satisfaction and retention remain high.

Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of this review was that a university librarian was included to assist with the development of the search terms and literature search. Also, a blinded review was

conducted. Following the blind review, the nurse authors met virtually in a synchronous format, once following the initial title/abstract screening, and again following the full-text review to discuss discrepancies. Furthermore, the nurse authors represented three of the four APRN specialties: certified nurse midwife, nurse practitioner, and certified nurse anesthetist. Each author offered a different perspective congruent with their specialty regarding the development of the literature search. There were also several limitations. First, the focus of the literature search was narrow, only targeting research involving APRNs who transitioned from clinical practice to an online/hybrid academic setting. Articles involving a brick-and-mortar or face-to-face setting, which could offer further perspective to the APRN's transition, were excluded. Scoping reviews have inherent limitations to the framework of the approach and focus more on providing breadth than depth of information. Lastly, even though this review was conducted in a detailed, meticulous manner, there is the possibility that appropriate studies were missed.

Conclusions

With the faculty shortage and the lack of integration of the academic role within many graduate nursing specialties tracks, it is necessary to understand what is being done to address this gap within nursing education that can profoundly affect advanced practice registered nurses in smoothly transitioning into the online academic teaching role. High-quality research studies exploring the transition of APRNs from clinical practice to online/hybrid academia and strategies to support this transition are needed.

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