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## Toolkit for a Successful Nurse Educator Sabbatical

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## Abstract

This article provides evidence to support the need for nursing faculty to attain sabbaticals. In addition, a toolkit is provided that walks faculty through a step-by-step process to ensure a successful sabbatical. Future nurses are counting on strong, engaging, and visionary faculty. Thus, to foster resilience, nursing faculty are encouraged to embrace the sabbatical opportunity.

**KEY WORDS** Nurse Educator – Renewal and Reflection – Sabbatical – Scholarship

Faculty in higher education are often afforded a sabbatical after having worked 7 to 10 years, demonstrating excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service. Gallagher (2018) noted that the word *sabbatical* is a “derivation of the word from the Hebrew *Shabbat* (Sabbath) and the Greek *sabbatikos* (a ceasing)” (p. 953). The goal of the sabbatical is to allow faculty a time for renewal and focused scholarship endeavors (Carmack, 1987). In addition, to enhance the quality and gains of a sabbatical, faculty should be encouraged to separate themselves from contact with their routine work site, including email communication (Davidson et al., 2010).

With the increasing demands on nursing faculty today, the provision of sabbaticals is crucial to ensure strong, productive, and resilient nurse educators. The increasing number of students in nursing programs and the decreasing number of doctorally prepared faculty escalate the importance of sabbaticals to foster faculty resilience (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2017, 2020).

As early as 1992, Dick reported that 39 percent of 236 doctoral nurse educators experienced moderate to high levels of burnout. A significant negative relationship ( $p < .05$ ) was found between burnout and participative management, presence of collegial support, and time spent in research and clinical practice. Management style was found to be the strongest predictor of burnout, with collegial support the second predictor. Aquino et al. (2018) provided data to describe how burnout of doctoral nurses in US faculty was leading to vacancies in faculty positions. Specifically, these researchers reported that, in their sample of 146, 71 faculty with PhD degrees were found to be experiencing emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, age, emotional exhaustion ( $p < .01$ ), and depersonalization ( $p < .001$ ) were identified to be significant predictors for faculty to leave academia.

Universities will find that the cost of paying a faculty's salary during a sabbatical is money well spent because faculty return rejuvenated, revitalized, and strengthened in their area of expertise. Fostering growth in tenured faculty ensures retention of strong and qualified educators, fosters scholarship that enhances the academic environment, grows the faculty profession, and enhances university morale.

## STEP-BY-STEP TOOLKIT

With this said, nursing faculty who are planning a sabbatical are often so burned out that the energy needed to design a sabbatical is minimal. To assist faculty who are thrilled to have a sabbatical but, at the same time, find it daunting, the following step-by-step guide is provided. Six main steps are needed to provide structure, guidance, and assistance to ensure faculty maximize their sabbatical: 1) determine area of interest, 2) develop scholarship goals, 3) explore funding sources to support sabbatical endeavor, 4) engage in personal and professional activities that promote faculty renewal and reflection, 5) design implementation and dissemination of the scholarly endeavor, and 6) implement personal reflection of sabbatical activities and plan on-going methods to maintain life-work balance.

### Determine Area of Interest/Develop Goals

Faculty must first determine their scholarly goals and identify a scholarship endeavor that will be enriching and empowering. That involves determining how advanced study in the identified area of expertise can be achieved. National or international travel may be needed to accomplish advanced scholarship. In planning the scholarship, faculty should plan achievable scholarship activities and examine how these endeavors may be continued to foster a robust scholarship trajectory (Stelfox et al., 2015).

### Explore Funding Sources

Once the scholarly point of interest has been determined, faculty may find that they need funding to accomplish their goals. Focus should be given to developing a budget that includes expenses for travel, travel insurance (if travel is international), housing, food, and the

expense of disseminating scholarship findings following completion of the sabbatical (e.g., conference fees, travel). Funding options to explore are those from within the university, as well as external grants that are designated to examine the chosen scholarly area.

External grants to examine would include professional organizations, corporate funding that focuses on addressing the needs of the identified scholarship outcomes, and nonprofit organizations that address the selected area of scholarship. Also, faculty will need to explore if their families will be traveling with them during the sabbatical and evaluate the additional challenges/attributes that these elements will bring to the experience (Stelfox et al., 2015).

### Rest and Renewal

To ensure the full success of the sabbatical, the fourth step is to schedule rest and renewal as well as scholarship while planning the designated sabbatical period. Faculty who have achieved a sabbatical have demonstrated passion for their area of expertise, teaching, and service. They are skilled at multitasking and making the most out of every minute of their work week. Thus, giving oneself permission to rest and enjoy life is often difficult.

To foster faculty resilience, the rest component of the sabbatical is as important, if not more important, than the scholarship period. Faculty should allow themselves to sleep, engage in regular physical and spiritual activity and personal interest/hobbies, and renew family/friend connections. Faculty are also highly encouraged to reflect on how, when they return from sabbatical, they might adapt their routine faculty role to create balance with rest and renewal. Based on the length of the sabbatical, it is suggested that the sabbatical begin with a week to a month of relaxation and renewal and then a period focused on preparing for the scholarship endeavor. Renewal and reflection are imperative in combating "emotional exhaustion and burnout," which Aquino et al. (2018) reported to be one of the leading reasons doctoral nursing faculty leave academia.

### Facilitating Scholarship

Step 5 involves implementing activities to facilitate the scholarly work: literature review, establishment of national/international collegial relationships, and identification of specific areas of the identified scholarship to be addressed. Time will be needed for the development of research projects; writing and attaining institutional review board (IRB) approval from the faculty's organization and other involved entities; and preparing lectures, scholarly engagement, or service endeavors. To ensure that sabbatical time is used wisely, development of the research project and submission to the IRB are best achieved prior to the sabbatical start date. This step provides faculty with a renewed sense of purpose, an expanded vision of the scholarship topic, and growth in affiliated collegial networks.

### Reflect and Replenish

Finally, it is recommended that faculty plan at least a week to a month at the completion of the scholarship endeavor to reflect and replenish. The reflection period should involve the following: 1) examine means of disseminating the scholarship endeavor, 2) explore modalities of integrating gained knowledge from the sabbatical experience into

teaching and professional interactions, and 3) review the faculty's full-time academic setting for expansion and change. Furthermore, faculty should evaluate lessons learned and how to maintain life balance going forward to foster resilience and longevity in the world of academia. This final period of rejuvenation will fortify faculty and promote a successful transition back into the demands of the faculty role.

### CONCLUSION

Although sabbaticals are refreshing, are energizing, and facilitate faculty resilience, nurse faculty in need of a sabbatical often feel unequipped to apply and lack the reserves needed to design a meaningful sabbatical. Furthermore, because of the nurse faculty shortage and increasing student enrollments, administrators and faculty may feel that time away for a sabbatical is not possible. Nursing research reflects that clinical administrators and nurses, who are also facing a workforce shortage, support the implementation of sabbaticals for clinical nurses to decrease burnout and increase satisfaction (Embree et al., 2015). Following this line of reasoning, deans of nursing schools must encourage and support tenured nursing faculty in attaining sabbaticals to foster strong, innovative leadership in the nursing academy.

The outlined step-by-step guidelines provide a clear and concise means to design and implement a meaningful and rejuvenating sabbatical. Following sabbatical, faculty return to their academic roles infused with energy, excited to share scholarly endeavors with students and peers, and ready to disseminate scholarly findings to expand the profession of nursing. To foster strong nursing faculty, strategies to enhance self-care must be implemented. Turkel (2015) highlighted the importance of nurses engaging in activities to support personal well-being. Maintenance of personal well-being to foster and enhance personal and professional balance ensures inner energy in nurse leaders, educators, and clinicians.

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