Notes on Continuing Education

In response to expressed needs of readers, faculty of the Department of Nursing in University of Wisconsin-Extension have been invited to discuss various aspects of continuing education in this new bimonthly feature. Your suggestions for topics are welcome.

Publisher

PLANNING COMMITTEES: AN ASSET IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

The content for continuing education programs in nursing must be relevant for any given target population and reflect the interest and needs of the consumer group. Program designers and coordinators have expertise in designing and conducting educational programs utilizing adult education principles; however, they may lack knowledge of needs, trends, content, and available resources in different fields for programming to this end.

Advisory committees have been used successfully in planning, designing, and promoting educational programs which are pertinent and practical for nurses engaged in specialty areas by securing the needed input from representatives of their own group.

COMPOSITION AND SELECTION

Ad hoc planning committees are used in preference to standing committees. The committee is selected from/made up of members representative of the group on the basis of knowledge and expertise in the specialty area and interest in conference efforts and is asked to serve to provide assistance in planning programs, participating in the program, and in conducting the annual conference. Establishment of committees for each conference insures representation with new and different ideas and from the location of conference since local facilities and resources are better known. Continuity in planning is provided through the nurse consultants and program coordinator.

For example, in selecting committee members for
for the Nursing Service Administrator's Conference, the program coordinator contacts the chairperson of the Nursing Service Administrator's group in the area, who submits the names appointed or volunteers of three representatives to serve on the annual program planning committee. Inasmuch as every attempt is made to include nursing administrators from all of the health care agencies, representatives are also obtained from nursing homes and community health agencies.

For the Occupational Health Nurses, the members are selected from volunteers or practitioners in the learner group, upon the recommendation of colleagues and the nurse consultants from the Wisconsin Division of Health. A professor who holds a chair in Occupational Health Nursing at the resident school, has been a recent addition and an asset.

Program evaluation reports include a section soliciting the names and addresses of persons interested in serving as a member of the planning committee. The size of the committee is usually limited to eight or ten persons. Large groups tend to be less effective.

The committee is appointed approximately six to nine months in advance of the program since good planning and promotion requires time and effort. Quality resource persons need to be secured early because many of them are heavily booked. No difficulty has been encountered in obtaining members to serve on planning committees.

COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

The chief responsibilities of the advisory planning committee include:

First, meeting with the program coordinator to assist with the planning process. Planning is initiated by:

a. Evaluating the previous conference as a starting point for planning the next one to meet the learning needs of nurses engaged in a given practice group.

b. Reviewing suggestions submitted by conferees from previous conference.

c. Develop program objectives, basic program format, and topic (or title).

d. Identify key issues or potential program topics to establish program priorities.
e. Select program topics, develop relevant content, and identify potential resource persons with alternates available. The committee assists with the development of content guidelines for extending invitation to resource persons to provide direction for development of content, achieving objective, and selecting appropriate methods for presenting content.

Second, supporting and promoting the program to colleagues.

Third, involving the committee representatives in program participation and assistance with conference details as listed below.

a. Conducting and chairing selected program sessions and special interest sessions.

b. Assisting with registration, greeting registrants, making registrants comfortable, and participating with coffee break.

c. Meeting key resource persons and preparing for program sessions.

PROCESS

The program coordinator makes preparation for the meeting by:

1. Making preliminary contact with members to confirm willingness to accept committee responsibilities;

2. Establishing the date and time convenient for the members.

3. Making arrangements for physical facilities at the location of the conference;

4. Preparing the agenda with outline of items to be discussed. A program brochure and summary of program evaluation reports from previous conference is also included to facilitate the identification of topics and needs; and

5. Serving as chairperson to facilitate the program planning expediently.

The chairperson provides a brief orientation about the meeting and its objectives and reviews established criteria for the development of a quality continuing education program for the learner group.

The meeting is kept informal but is focused on the business outlined in the agenda. Care is taken to keep digressions to a minimum. Ideas and suggestions
are solicited from all of the members.

Notes for direction in planning are kept by the program coordinator to proceed with final program development; however, a progress report is sent to keep the members informed about how the program developed from their suggestions and recommendations. In some committees, a recorder is appointed for keeping minutes as Cooper and Knowles recommend.\(^2,3\)

The number of meetings held is limited to one or two preconference and possibly a brief one at the conference for providing final directions, etc.

After the conference, the program evaluation reports completed by the conferees are summarized, and the members of the Advisory Planning Committee are sent a copy with a letter of appreciation to advise them about the effectiveness of the conference as evaluated by their colleagues.

**BENEFITS OF PLANNING COMMITTEES**

The major benefits which result from the use of an ad hoc advisory planning committee include:

1. Program is planned around the interest and needs of consumer learner group.
2. Program content is practical application for use in respective work settings.
3. The involvement of representative increases interest, satisfaction, and stimulates enthusiasm.
4. The participation tends to make it the group's conference.
5. Assistance provided by the committee members in conducting a conference assures an effective program.
6. Results in a well-attended conference.

**DISADVANTAGES**

The disadvantages are relatively minor as related to the benefits cited above.

1. More time is required in planning, but the results achieved far outweigh the time involved.
2. Delay in selection of or obtaining experts from the consumer group to participate.
3. Money has not been available for paying committee representatives for time and
travel expenses to attend meetings; however, the committee members' employment agencies have been most generous in supporting this type of activity. People are delighted to serve, consider it an honor, and are committed to planning a program for their group. Frequently, the members have asked to serve on the committee again.

CONCLUSION

The use of advisory committees in planning and designing continuing education programs for special consumer groups is invaluable for meeting their learning needs and interests.

To recognize the contribution of committee members, the sponsoring agency may permit them to attend without payment of fee.

REFERENCES


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