

Impact of the Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree: A Look Back from the Beginning of the First DNP Program

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Overview



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Presentation Objectives:

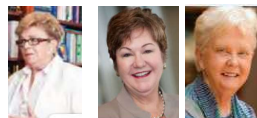
- To illustrate the value that DNP graduates have brought to the nursing profession
- To learn what some of the early pioneer DNP graduates say about their DNP
- To describe opinions of graduates about the importance of their DNP project on organizational outcomes
- To learn the benefits of a DNP from the perspectives of graduates

The speakers declare no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this presentation.

This study/work was done as part of our role at the University of Kentucky. No sponsorship, grant, or commercial support existed for this study/work.

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■ First DNP program opened in 2001 (MSN to DNP, Leadership Focus) as a 3 year Post-MSN hybrid program



“Nursing has always put the emphasis on the big picture which is the nature of a holistic approach. A nurse in executive-level leadership can help others **connect passion to purpose.**”

TUKEA TALBERT, DNP, RN
Chief Nursing Officer, Clark Regional Medical Center



The College of Nursing is breaking new ground with BSN-DNP Option that offers six specialty tracks

2008

As health care becomes more complex, the demands on advanced nursing practice are growing as well.

In October 2010, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) reported that the number of nurses prepared with a doctorate must double by 2020 to meet the nation's needs. In response to the IOM comprehensive report on medical errors and report on health professions education, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) published a position statement on the practice-focused doctoral degree in 2004, calling for a transition date of 2015 for the preparation of advanced practice nurses at the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) level of education.

High standard. Short timeline. But the UK College of Nursing is already positioned to deliver.

The UK DNP Program is celebrating its 10th anniversary, and now there are two ways to enter the program. In addition to a post-Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) entry point, the school offers a post-Bachelor's (BSN) entry option. Both culminate with the DNP degree.

"I am very proud that UK nursing faculty members continue to lead as early adopters in BSN-to-DNP education," says Dean Jane Kirchling, DNS, RN, FAAN, College of Nursing. "The DNP curriculum optimizes the nurse's ability to work in a very complex health care environment."

In the BSN-DNP Option, students choose from six specialty tracks to expand their knowledge base and skill set in the specialization that most interests them. Although each track focuses on a population with targeted health problems, all the tracks share a curriculum of core courses.

"Regardless of their population focus, it is extremely important today for nurses to understand how to assess the evidence we have for the best approach to care, how to apply it and how to evaluate it," explains Patricia B. Howard, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, associate dean for MSN and DNP studies at the College of Nursing.

1 Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner Track

Melanie Hardin-Pierce, DNP, RN, ACNP has been working at the College of Nursing since 1995 and is a board-certified acute care nurse practitioner. As the Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner Track coordinator, Dr. Hardin-Pierce knows that what sets UK's program apart is an emphasis on the critical care management of adult and geriatric patients in high-acuity settings, which includes preparation for intensivist and hospitalist roles.

"We also emphasize outpatient care of our 'chronically critically ill' patients so students are truly prepared to be successful in their careers as frontline providers," she says.

Adult-gerontology acute care nurse practitioners focus on assessment, diagnosis and management of acute health problems. Graduates are prepared to care for acutely and critically ill adults. As members of a multidisciplinary health care team, practitioners work in intensive care, progressive care, other hospital units, specialty clinics and specialty physicians' offices.

"They are highly skilled individuals who must have a keen understanding about technology and evidence-based treatment of patients to provide tertiary restorative and preventive care to patients and their families. We prepare them to be leaders at the highest level of clinical practice," explains Dr. Hardin-Pierce. Students in the program are surrounded by faculty who are all board certified and who actively practice in acute care settings.

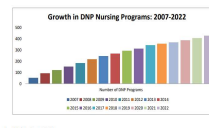
Stanley Tibong, BSN, RN, CCRN, is a second-year student in this track and currently works in a critical care setting. "I like to care for critically ill patients and be able to implement the best possible care using evidence-based practice to improve on their outcomes."

After graduation, Mr. Tibong plans to continue to work in critical care and become a part-time educator as well.

Introduction

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- **2004**: Schools that were AACN members voted to endorse the “Position Statement on the Practice Doctorate in Nursing”
- **2006** the AACN released the initial “Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice”
- **2015**: AACN White Paper on “The DNP: Current Issues and Clarifying Recommendations” (Scholarship, DNP Project, and Curriculum Considerations)
- **2021**: New Essentials. “The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education” (AACN, 2021)
- Currently, **2023**, 426 DNP programs + 70 in planning stages (AACN Fact Sheet: DNP)
- DNP programs exist in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and some states have ten or more DNP programs



Why do nurses want a DNP (per the literature?)

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- Over **95%** of graduates pursued a DNP to obtain additional knowledge, approximately **80%** for better job opportunities, and over 70% for increased competencies and skills (Kesten et al, 2021)
- Competencies participants reported acquiring in their DNP education (**95% of participants**) included translation of evidence to practice, literature synthesis, outcome evaluation, quality improvement, and designing and implementing EBP and research (Kesten et al, 2021)
- Over **60%** of participants felt the DNP had a substantial impact on their ability to make organizational change and impact quality improvement, evidence-based practice, and leadership outcomes (Minnick et al, 2019)
- DNP education prepares nurses to be effective leaders in complex healthcare roles and to function effectively on multidisciplinary teams (Bowie et al, 2019)



Introduction/Background

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- 2022, *The State of Doctor of Nursing Practice Education* (AACN)
 - Mixed-methods design which included a literature review, a DNP curriculum analysis of 50 programs, an analysis of AACN program data from a 15-year period, survey of more than 800 DNP graduates, and interviews with 42 DNP graduates, employers and academic leaders to better understand perceptions about DNP graduates, their skill sets, and their experiences
 - While DNP graduates were largely satisfied with their education, **nurse executives, administrators, and faculty indicated a higher level of satisfaction that did nurse practitioners**
 - The **majority** of DNP programs are **mostly online**
 - **No evidence of lower quality outcomes connected to online DNP programs**
 - **Higher value perceived by DNP graduates working in administrative, executive, and faculty roles** than do DNP's who are in practice roles
 - Employer interviews (n=13)--**Most could not identify differences in the provision of direct patient care** provided by MSN and DNP-prepared nurses.
 - Academic leaders could not identify differences in clinical skills between MSN and DNP-prepared nurses.

“Strength in leadership was noted as a hallmark of DNP education”

(Boswell et al, 2021, p. 196).



Introduction/Background in Relation to DNP projects

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- **DNP projects have existed since the beginning of the DNP**, in that University of Kentucky College of Nursing required it's first DNP graduates to complete a DNP project
- AACN reported that studies agree that the overall goal of DNP projects is to promote improved quality outcomes and to lead to practice change
- Minnick et al (N=1,308) DNP participants--found that project outcomes most frequently included provider education, guideline implementation, and changes in attitudes/perceptions/beliefs
- Turkson-Ocran et al found (n=191 projects) that articles related to the DNP project were **published in scholarly journals for 21% of students**
- **Challenges** exist in working with students on DNP projects: **inadequate student support for scholarly writing**, lack of faculty expertise in guiding students to complete their DNP project, and minimal focus on sustainability of recommendations from DNP project (Wright et al, 2022).
- The **new AACN Essentials document states** that the DNP project, or a "scholarly work that aims to improve clinical practice. . . is required of students completing a practice doctorate in nursing" (p. 25).



Purpose

- The purposes of the study this presentation is based on included multiple objectives, including:
 - to learn about the accomplishments of one college's DNP graduates and how they have impacted the profession
 - to find what value student DNP projects have brought to the profession and to organizations within which projects were conducted

Methods



- Cross-sectional survey, mixed-methods design
- N = 448 DNP graduates (N=348 due to no contact information for 100)
- REDCap survey with study invited emailed to participants
 - Demographic items
 - DNP impact items
 - Outcomes from DNP project items
 - Open-ended descriptive items



Instrument



From 1 (not at all) to 5 (profound), what was the impact of your DNP degree on your ability to accomplish outcomes in the following areas:

	Not impact at all	2	3	4	Profound impact
38) Organizational change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
39) Quality improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
40) Evidence-based practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
41) Practice (eg, hospital, clinic, etc) leadership role	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
42) Policy setting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
43) Academic faculty role	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
44) Academic Leadership role	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate the impact that the DNP had on increasing your knowledge and expertise in the following areas.

	No impact	A minor or low impact	Somewhat or moderately impactful	Very impactful	Major or profound impact
45) Understanding of system level issues including quality of care and finance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
46) Leadership in patient care and health care systems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
47) Influence on health policy, local, regional, or state	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
48) Influence on health policy, national or international	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
49) Improve clinical management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
50) Improve inter-professional practice and collaboration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

60) What would define as the greatest benefits of your DNP education in relation to your career advancement or professional accomplishments?

61) How would you rate the value of your DNP education in relation to helping you stand out as a leader in your organization?

Was of no value/importance
 Was not of much value
 Was moderately valuable/important
 Was very valuable/important
 Was extremely valuable/important

62) How would you rate the value of your DNP education in relation to helping you influence patient outcomes either for your individual patients or for groups of patients.

Was of no value/importance
 Was not of much value
 Was moderately valuable/important
 Was very valuable/important
 Was extremely valuable/important

63) In relation to the importance of your DNP degree on your career advancement, rate the level of impact your DNP degree had on your career success.

Not at all important
 Slightly important
 Moderately important
 Very important
 Extremely important

64) What is the most important take away (or value) from your DNP degree?

65) Considering the costs and benefits of degree attainment, on a scale of 1, not at all, to 10, a necessity, how necessary is it for every Advanced Practice Registered Nurse to obtain a DNP?

1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7
 8
 9
 10

Descriptive Summary of Demographic and Position Characteristics (N = 90)

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Variable	Mean (Std Dev); range or n (%)
Gender	
Male	7 (7.9%)
Female	79 (88.8%)
Gender neutral/prefer not to answer	3 (3.3%)
Race	
White	85 (94.5)
Asian/Black/Hispanic	1 (1.1%) each
Other/Prefer not to answer	2 (2.2%)
Age	47.0 (13.6); 29-79
Program Entry	
BSN to DNP	51 (56.7%)
MSN to DNP	39 (43.3%)
Year Completed the Program	
2005-2009	11 (12.4%)
2010-2014	13 (14.6%)
2015-2019	51 (57.3%)
2020-2021	14 (15.7%)

Descriptive Summary of Demographic and Position Characteristics (N = 90)

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Years of Practice as APN since DNP	4.7 (4.6); 0-17
Promoted to new role after DNP completion?	
In same position as prior	21 (24.2%)
Promoted once since graduating	48 (55.2%)
Promoted twice or more since graduating	18(20.6%)
Work Setting	
Hospital	40 (44.4%)
University/College of Nursing	29 (32.2%)
Ambulatory	23 (25.6%)
Other setting	8 (8.9%)
Role in Various Work Areas and Projects	% Participant, Leader, respectively
QI design and implementation projects	21.9%, 37.9%
Organizational change projects	28.1%, 34.8%
Safety focused projects	27.0%, 16.8%
Policy change, organization	27.0%, 24.7%
Research projects/studies	32.6%, 13.5%
Developing tools to improve patient outcomes	36.4%, 20.4%
Developing tools to impact system or org out	23.9%, 19.3%
Technology or informatics projects	18.2%, 14.8%
Health delivery system project	23.9%, 13.6%
Opening a new program or service	20.2%, 28.1%

Comparison of Evaluation Summary Scores between BSN to DNP and MSN to DNP and between those in a Clinical Practice Positions and those in Other Roles/Positions (Leadership or Support)

Evaluation Summary Variable (Perception)	Degree at DNP Entry			Clinical Practice Position		
	BSN (n=51)	MSN (n=39)	(p-value)	Yes (n=46)	No (n=44)	(p-value)
Impact on Ability to Accomplish Outcomes	21.1	25.9	(.002)	21.4	25.1	(.018)
Impact on Increasing Knowledge/Expertise	49.1	53.4	(.074)	49.6	52.4	(.26)
Value of DNP Education	10.6	12.7	(<.001)	10.5	12.6)	(<.001)

Qualitative Summary of Narrative Comments

Greatest Accomplishment Since You Graduated from the DNP Program	Number
Career advancement/promotion	22
Improved patient care quality/implementation evidence-based practice	21
Became a better leader, leading to improved performance outcomes	19
Developed/enhanced a new program	14
Faculty impact/student development	11
Greatest benefits of your DNP to Career Advancement or Professional Opportunities	
New skills/knowledge	40
Status due to degree credibility	25
Promotion	9
New job/new benefits	8
Minimal/no benefit	6

Qualitative Summary of Narrative Comments

Most Important Take-away or Value from DNP Degree	
Enhanced leadership skills	19
Improved clinical knowledge and skills	15
Importance of terminal degree/role credibility	11
No value	11
Competence to publish and perform research	10
Increased satisfaction/self-efficacy	9
New perspectives/understanding of system change	6
How Did DNP Contribute an Impact on Professional of Nursing	
Increased credibility leading to increased professional impact overall	25
Led to organizational improvements/outcomes	12
Led to improvements in patient care outcomes	8
Developing/teaching/mentoring others	8
None or none at this point	5



DNP Projects

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- DNP Project related
 - **48 of 90** students validated that their DNP project helped to influence or contribute to practice as an advanced practice nurse and one stated their project “changed policy”
 - **57%** stated their DNP project influenced/informed their contributions to practice
 - Project focus:
 - QI, 19%;
 - clinical practice improvement, **42%**;
 - care delivery project, 11%;
 - pre-post assessment following educ intervention, 27%;
 - pre-post assessment following noneducational intervention, 21%;
 - evidence-based, **42%**;
 - health delivery system, 12%
 - One student said: Since my project I am much more focused on evidence-based practice, the importance of stakeholder involvement and the necessity of always evaluating outcomes.
 - **19% published** an article as an outcome of their DNP project work

Summary Impact Results: Total Sample (n=90)

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- **84%** of participants reported that the DNP **helped them stand out as a leader**
- **86%** stated the DNP **impacted career advancement**
- **Post BSN to DNP graduates perceived less value** from the program than did post-MSN students
- Increased professional credibility was mentioned by several participants as an outcome of their DNP
- **Value of DNP to help you stand out as a leader** = (70% extremely or very valuable)
- **Value of DNP in helping you influence outcomes** = (61% extremely or very valuable)
- **Value of DNP on career advancement** = (37% extremely impmt; 35% very impmt; 14% moderately impmt)
- Considering the cost/benefit of a DNP, **how valuable is it for every APRN to obtain a DNP**, using a scale of 1 to 10? (8-10, 59.64%; 5-7, 28.07%; 4-1, 8% (7 participants)
- Narrative feedback related to **top achievements since graduation** included career advancement/promotion (n=22), improving patient care quality/implementation of evidence-based initiatives (n=21), and becoming a better leader (n=19).

Value of DNP Narrative (pro and con)

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- “The DNP degree has opened many doors for me but more importantly it prepared me to lead, understand the science, practice according to the evidence, translate and implement best practices to improve my patient’s outcomes.”
- The degree demands respect and allows you to go in many directions to be a voice.

- No value. I worked as a MSN prepared APRN prior to obtaining my DNP. I thought that the DNP would open more doors but it really didn't, nor did it add anything to my clinical abilities to do my job.
- When I look back on my degree I do see that many others are practicing at my level with a Masters. In the clinical world a DNP does not seem to matter as much as it does in the academic, executive, or research world.
- I feel like the value of the DNP is still lost on the majority of the nursing profession. The addition of online, for-profit programs have also diluted the pool of well-rounded leaders that have the true essentials and skill needed to practice at a doctorate level.
- The value of my degree is beans and feels like a waste of my time.
- Although I found having my DNP helpful in implementing evidence based practice and leadership skills, my employer posts no value in your DNP. I do not have a higher salary or treated with any higher standard than with someone with their MSN.

Discussion

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- Illustrates the impact, over time, that graduates from the initial DNP class have made in the nursing profession
- Findings supported the AACN 2022 report-- DNP graduates impact patient and organizational outcomes by the translation of evidence into practice and through applying leadership skills to practice
- High correlation between the variable related to value of one's DNP education and impact on expertise level and accomplishment of outcomes
- MSN to DNP graduates and graduates in nonclinical positions perceived more benefit from their DNP education than did BSN to DNP graduates in the areas of "Impact on Ability to Accomplish" and "Value of DNP Education"
- Whether comparing between type of degree pre-DNP or by clinical practice status, no difference between the groups on "Impact on Knowledge/Expertise," which highlights similar perception of this content area regardless of preparation or current position
- **Multiple participants have moved into academic roles and through their work with students have developed new DNP programs and multiplied their value through educating and developing new DNP-prepared practitioners and leaders.**

Discussion (c)

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- Comments made by a few nurse practitioner graduates indicated that the value of DNP-prepared nurse practitioners needs to be made clearer.
- DNP was initially envisioned as the degree needed to prepare leaders in advancing clinical practice (McCauley et al, 2020)
- Problems remain with differentiating how skills of DNP-prepared graduates differ from those of Master's graduates

Limitations

- Fewer respondents from the first 10 graduating classes (but expected since much smaller classes)
- Lack of accessibility of some prior graduates



Conclusion

The value of DNP-prepared providers who can quickly pivot to meet patient and healthcare system needs is critical as we move forward to meet the diverse healthcare needs of our nation (Melander et al, JPN, Pending Pub).

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*According to the U.S. News & World Report's 2022 Graduate School



Conclusions

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- The findings from this study supported the AACN 2022 report which indicated that DNP graduates impact patient and organizational outcomes by the translation of evidence into practice and through applying leadership skills in unlimited situations/settings.
- **The DNP made graduates stand out as a leader and illustrated the broad return on investment that employing DNP graduates can bring.**
- More study is needed to differentiate or illustrate how DNP education results in a different level of outcome impact.
- DNP education merits consideration by nursing leaders outside of the United States since more international countries with doctoral level nursing programs have PhD's or Professional Doctoral degrees.
- As colleges of nursing across the United States begin to assess the advanced level competencies of DNP graduates, as outlined in the new 2021 Essentials, quantifying outcomes from DNP programs needs to be a stronger focus.

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UK College of Nursing celebrates 20 years of DNP

Nurse Practitioner Named #2 Best U.S. Job in 2023

Questions/Discussion

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