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BACKGROUND

- Physician Assistants (PAs) and Nurse practitioners (NPs) comprise over 35% of the primary care (PC) workforce.
- Many newly hired PC PAs and NPs experience stress and difficulty as they transition to practice. This can lead to feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, and role ambiguity, as well as decreased job satisfaction and increased intent to leave.
- Negative outcomes can increase costly turnover, impact care continuity, and place patients at risk for poor clinical outcomes.
- Onboarding, the process of helping new hires adjust to social and performance aspects of their new job, has the potential to ease transition to practice for NPs and PAs.
- Recent research has linked PA/NP onboarding programs to increased engagement of NPs/PAs, decreased turnover, and higher clinical productivity.

PURPOSE

Identify strengths and areas for improvement in existing primary care onboarding programs, from the perspective of participants.

METHODS

Thirteen semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted. Participants were asked about their onboarding program, including strengths, weaknesses, adequacy, and perceptions regarding successful transition into their position following the program. Two authors analyzed all transcripts using an inductive coding approach to identify themes.

Inclusion Criteria	Participant Characteristics	Employment Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New graduate PA or NP in PC Hired within the last 12-48 months Participated in an existing onboarding program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N=13 6 NPs and 7 PAs Mean Age: NP: 32, PA: 27 77% Female 77% Graduated 2018-2019 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 69% Work within a Non-Community Health Center PC Setting 46% Work in PC sites within the Midwestern US

RESULTS

Characteristics of Strong Onboarding: Structural and Psychosocial Components

"Every other week primary care didactic sessions by specialists [were very helpful]"

Improving Competencies: Participants discussed the benefit of having a review of primary care topics, electronic health records training and skills training performed through various methods of teaching and feedback.

"Having a PA mentor was the biggest [help]"

Promoting Mentorship: Formal and informal mentorships provided participants with guidance during the onboarding process and helped them build a professional identity.

"An opportunity to shadow other team members [could; provide a better understanding of roles]"

Orientating to Organizational Dynamics: Participants found orientation to the culture and values of the organization, and as well as team structure and roles, essential to their onboarding.

"It was nice to have flexibility with the [patient] schedule"

Tailoring Ramp Up of Patient Schedule: Participants appreciated the ability to influence the pace of patient scheduling ramp up, to slow down or speed up based on their needs.

"A formal folder with outlined expectations was really nice to have"

Clarifying Expectations: Participants expressed a need for clear guidance on the ultimate expectations for their productivity, goals for procedures or professionalism expectations.

"If any issues did arise... [my mentor] would work with me to fix them"

Providing Clear Organizational Support: Participants valued effective and open communication and frequent check-ins from various colleagues.

"I never felt that they pushed me or overwhelmed me to do more than what I was comfortable with"

Creating a Feeling of Comfort: Participants stated onboarding created a sense of comfort within the organization.

"It gave me that sense of confidence, I always felt I had the support I needed"

Building Professional Self-Confidence: Open communication, supportive mentorship, protected time for learning, and gradual ramp-up allowed them to build confidence in themselves.

DISCUSSION

"The things that I found most helpful, both practically and emotionally, was the combination of the time I needed to learn and develop the knowledge and skills, and the understanding that that was normal and the expectation."

- Identified structural components of onboarding contributed to participants' sense of feeling supported by the organization and increased their comfort and confidence in their role as primary care practitioners.
- These findings align with previous research identifying role clarity and self-efficacy as important facilitators for a successful transition to practice.

IMPLICATIONS

- For organizations, our findings can inform development and enhancement of primary care onboarding programs aimed at improving recruitment, retention, and performance of new graduate PAs and NPs.
- For new NPs and PAs negotiating for their first job, our findings can help identify onboarding components that other new clinicians found important in their transition to practice.
- Future research should evaluate outcomes of onboarding programs

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