

Developing Nurse Mentorship Programs Across the State: The Value of Human Connections

By Daria Waszak, DNP, RN, CNE, COHN-S and Samantha Tunney, BSN, RN-BC

Nurse residency coordinators exchanged quick, meaningful discussions as they swapped partners in moving circles. This was just one of the simulated, interactive activities in a kick-off workshop to promote meaningful nurse mentorship programs in several hospitals across the state. The New Jersey Collaborating Center for Nursing (NJCCN) coordinated with Spark Reach Leadership to launch this professional development program in April 2026 for leaders of the nurse mentorship programs with 15 hospitals in its statewide nurse residency collaborative.

Participating hospitals will match new nurses with a mentor during or at the tail of the 12-month nurse residency program to provide another peer (in addition to their preceptor) to engage with for a structured, evidence-based mentorship. Coordinators can decide when and how this program works depending on the needs of their organization. For example, this can also be rolled out to new nurse leaders.



Rutgers School of Nursing MSN student Samantha Tunney, alongside Josh Berger and Alexis Harrell of Spark Reach Leadership, led the group through interactive mentorship activities.

Through hands-on learning and peer exchange, workshop participants were equipped with practical tools to strengthen mentorship by building rapport, fostering engagement, and creating welcoming environments that encourage

open communication and collaboration. One of the participants, Leslie Beck, MSN, RN, NPD-BC of Jefferson Health reflected, “The experience with SparkReach was both insightful and engaging, offering practical meaningful strategies to strengthen mentor development. The interpersonal interactions fostered meaningful connections and shared learning among participants.” These strategies can be repeated by the mentorship coordinators with their mentors, who can then apply these same strategies with their group of mentees. The lessons reinforced the idea that effective mentorship extends beyond the transfer of knowledge; it is rooted in trust, empathy, and personal connections.



The workshop, attended by several nurse residency coordinators from New Jersey hospitals.

The Value of Mentorship

New Jersey has an unstable nursing workforce with attrition on the rise and shortages in the forecast (NJCCN, 2026). Additionally, about 22.7% of new nurses abandon their position within the first year of employment (NSI Nursing Solutions Inc., 2026). With that said, it is important to make effective investments in retention. In an era that is characterized by digital communication, remote work, and technology-driven interactions, opportunities for authentic human connec-

tions have become more valuable than ever. While technological advancements have expanded access to information and support, they have also contributed to a sense of separation that cannot be addressed through a screen alone. In fact, robust mentorship programs that are included in the culture have increased retention rates (Bell et al., 2025; Rowen et al., 2025).

NJCCN also connected hospitals in its nurse residency collaborative with other mentorship resources, including those that are provided through Kaufman HallTM (Vizient) as well as a mentorship platform partner, MentorLeadTM. If you would like to learn more about these resources, please reach out to NJCCN Executive Director, Dr. Daria Waszak at daria.waszak@rutgers.edu ■

References

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