

Not at all Contrary: How does our Garden Grow?



Joan L. Shaver, PhD,
RN, FAAN

As I write my last message as President of the AAN, I want to thank you as fellows for the honor of serving you and thank my Board Director colleagues for their support and dedication as we have put this organization through a type of metamorphosis over the last year or two. For the future, I can see at least 2 dynamics, fertilizer if you will, for enhancing how our AAN garden grows. One being sustained “organizational mentorship” from you as fellows and another by “founding and aligning groups and resources.”

Organizational Mentorship

After being asked to mentor AAN Fellow Kristen Swanson, as a Robert Wood Johnson Executive Nurse Leader Fellow, I reflected on what it means to mentor: sharing wisdom, modeling leadership, opening doors, guidance for “knowing thyself,” among other things. As a corollary at a systems level, “organizational mentorship” is a staple for our growth.

AAN Living Legend Claire Fagin has been a terrific example of growth-producing “organizational mentorship.” She persuaded the John A. Hartford Foundation leadership to partner and envision the *Building Academic Geriatric Nursing Capacity* initiative. Consequently we became the AAN Hartford Coordinating Center. This transformative initiative, recently re-funded for expansion with roughly \$10.7 million over the next 5 years, has changed to face of nursing leadership for geriatric healthcare by supporting over 100 geriatric nursing scholars. While such an initiative presents administrative challenges to support, access to resources enriches our agenda for promoting healthy aging in ways leading to mutual gain between the AAN and the J. A. Hartford Foundation. We acknowledged this extraordinary “organizational mentorship” by giving the 2005 AAN Civitas award to Claire at our 2005 annual meeting and look to growing this part of our garden as now guided by Fellow Pat Archbold.

“Organizational mentorship” is emanating from the leaders of our Workforce

Commission, who have garnered the resources to hold conferences, publish findings, communicate across stakeholders, and write grant proposals, most lately to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. With further funding, we will continue to grow this initiative, focused on harnessing technologies to redesign work for hospital-based nurses.

Through Fellow Ruth Kleinpell’s “organizational mentorship,” the Acute Care, Aging and Quality expert panels consortium attained small grant to fund analysis activity related to hospitalized older adults. Other expert panels have negotiated resources for disseminating parts of our aging and quality healthcare agendas. Clearly, attracting grants contracts and opening the doors to collaborative partners reflects “organizational mentorship” of the capacity-building kind.

Beyond participating in work within the AAN infrastructure or governance of the AAN as a form of “organizational mentorship,” many fellows have helped us partner with other groups to grow our capacity. For example, our partnership with the Gertrude E. Skelly Charitable Foundation, through trustee Erik Joh has provided capital to invite provocateurs and seeded analyses at our annual meetings. At AAN Annual Meetings and CANS research meetings, our partnership with the American Nurses Foundation is providing grant funding for the Gloria E. Smith Lectureships to focus our attention on our role in reducing health disparities. From a strategic point of view, let us think through how our ANF-AAN partnership or others could be a nexus for future expansion and growth.

Please consider using your mentorship to create access to grants, partners, or other kinds of resources for the AAN to advance our productivity and influence.

“Organizational mentoring” in support of building capacity occurs through leaving a legacy through philanthropy. Our development committee has worked hard to develop a sustained annual fund whereby fellows can support the AAN from the heart. These funds help us to

Nurs Outlook 2005;53:
266-267.

0029-6554/05/\$—see front
matter

Copyright © 2005 Mosby, Inc.
All rights reserved.

doi:10.1016/j.outlook.2005.11.004

place an AAN voice in circles likely to impact healthcare policy. One example is the IOM/AAN/ANF Fellow and our goal is to develop other senior fellowship opportunities. Growth through this strategy is long-range, preferably building through endowment whereby we as fellows choose to honor the AAN by current gifts or in our estate planning. Once we have sufficient and enduring funding, fertile initiatives to build more capacity will lie among the ideas germinating within our Health Disparities Task Force or Nursing Education Special Interest Group, or other talented groups.

Please consider that your organizational mentorship will shine through in the generosity of your personal support and gifts to the AAN.

Founding and Aligning Groups and Resources

I believe that fertilizing AAN growth of influence could lie in aligned groups and resources for which the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science (CANS) is a ready example. While the AAN is a peer-elected group and does not have rapid and expansive growth of membership potential, we have facilitated the open membership of the CANS. One does not need to be a member of the AAN to join. I have been acting as liaison to the CANS and assisting with strategic considerations on how to make it “a national voice for nursing research” through which we as the AAN can express our valuing of nursing research. The strengths of the CANS lie in its consortium-type governance (a partnership with the 4 regional nursing research societies; Sigma Theta Tau International, the American Nurses Foundation, and the National Institute for Nursing Research) and representation and governance by grass roots nursing researchers. In October, a special topics conference on clinical intervention research in combination with the 20th anniversary kick-off for NINR marked another success. The

CANS is looking forward to a State of Nursing Science Congress in 2006, ably led by Fellow Margaret Grey and her team. In my view, we have the opportunity to build the capacity of the CANS in size and scope of activities and strengthen the capacity of the AAN in concert.

Might we establish other aligned groups in the interest of building the influence of the AAN so that both groups might flourish for mutual gain? For example, as the Board, we are being petitioned to adopt a category of international fellows. As I write this, we have not determined whether or how to accommodate this idea. Is this where an open-member aligned group might work to advantage? Are there other groups through which we might advance our mission and align others?

Looking to the Future

Making unprecedented, preferably innovative things happen requires resources — talent, time, money, and sometimes space and accoutrements. Most administrative leaders know the importance of making strategic investments in acquiring new and developing existing talent and providing seed money and resources at the point of productivity. For the AAN, the point of productivity and the talent is in the expert panels, commissions, special interest groups, committees, and task forces, all volunteers. While we need to make more investments, we have made \$500/year available to each Expert Panel. This is hardly a windfall of strategic capital but appropriated with the intent to seed the search for other resources or allow the production of low or no cost deliverables.

For the AAN, imperative for coupling to the volunteer leaders is a support staff focused on the fundamentals for keeping the organization viable as well as actualizing large dreams or stretch goals. Fundamentals for the AAN include new fellow, honorary fellow, living legend and award recipient selections, naming fellows to special positions, and for

us and the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science (CANS) facilitating board and committee meetings, annual meetings and conferences as well as collecting dues, communicating with fellows, members or partners, marketing, and a host of other things. Important for growth is to invest so that staff can perform beyond the fundamental activities. I am grateful to EDI for making us more robust in this regard. For example, Kay Whalen, EDI President, who has remained closely aligned with AAN through our transition, facilitated hiring of our most competent staff, including most recently Amy Stone as our Development and Program Director.

Overall, I see the AAN garden as thriving. Our bottom line is black; we have stabilized our organizational sustenance processes and communication links with you as Fellows and other constituents, thanks to Annette Hess, Carina Tran, and Becky Gade in the office. We have recruited Amy Stone to build on this foundation. Through grant funding groups of fellows have established our presence in building academic geriatric nursing capacity, and are pushing workforce, quality and health disparities agendas. We have launched and facilitate an aligned open member group to be a national voice for nursing research composed of “grass roots” investigators. We have 16 expert panels addressing analyses of knowledge with policy implications. We have sown the seeds of change in thoughtful ways and are working towards endowing our future.

The cachet of being a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing is ever more valuable. We are acknowledging our legends and guiding our emerging leaders. From the AAN garden, the fragrance of success permeates and the blooms embolden the future. I consider it a distinct privilege to have served as President of the AAN and I look to “organizationally mentoring” from vantage point of past-president.