

**From Educators, For Educators:
Stress, Change, and Peer-to-Peer Advice in Higher Education**

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Abstract. Educator stress, burn-out and fatigue greatly affect faculty success and retention. The purpose of this research was to increase understanding of the lived experiences of educators and identify tangible strategies to help them thrive in higher education. Using an online open-ended cross-sectional survey and content analysis, this study explored qualitative data regarding nursing faculty experiences of stress, changes in pedagogy, and peer-to-peer faculty advice. Findings from 113 participants highlight recommendations from and for educators including pedagogical approaches as well as insights on compassion, compassion-fatigue, and self-compassion. Educator experiences are shared with the hope that faculty will use peer guidance to reflect on their own activities, make enhancements, and enact change.

Keywords: Higher education; teaching; nurse educator; faculty; compassion

Academic experiences in higher education were, and continue to be, deeply impacted by COVID-19 with the disruption continuing to stand as a marker in time separating the state of education prior to the pandemic and the current state of education (Lewis & Kuhfield, 2023). This study explores the changes nursing educators have experienced since the height of the pandemic. Positioning educators as experts on their own experience and seeking to tap into their wisdom, this study describes current conditions for teaching in higher education and provides recommendations to help nursing educators thrive. Through the collection and analysis of rich, qualitative data from nursing faculty, insights into stress and change among those teaching in higher education today are recounted. Additionally, recommendations from educators for educators are detailed. These recommendations include important observations about changes in teaching practice as well as insights on compassion, compassion-fatigue, and self-compassion. These insights are shared in effort to increase understanding, and the effectiveness, of teaching and learning in higher education. While findings are largely applicable to nursing educators, they also serve to inform, more broadly, any individual (academic, administrator, researcher, policymaker, etc.) seeking to appreciate the complex, changing nature of teaching, and learning in higher education. As the media, public and private organizations, politicians, and the public writ large continue to wrestle with the aftermath of the impact of the pandemic on education, it is important to keep the voices of educators front and center. To this end, this work seeks to describe the faculty experience using the words and experiences of educators themselves.

Background

Estimates reveal that one-third of all people on college campuses, including students, staff, and faculty, experience symptoms of stress, depression, and/or anxiety (Meeks et al., 2023). While there is ample literature on the mental health and wellness of college students, there is far less research describing the mental health of faculty (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023). Higher education faculty have significant stressors influencing their mental health including teaching, advising, and mentoring pressures, administrative responsibilities, pressure to research and publish, tenure and promotion pressures, limited resources to accomplish their goals, and dissatisfaction with institutional leadership (Urbina-Garcia, 2020). While factors including stigma, privacy, fear, and unfamiliarity with mental health needs may be influencing why there is less research on mental health among faculty (Meeks et al., 2023), faculty continue to serve in their roles, negotiate career paths, and traverse academic competition to the potential detriment of their mental health (Melnyk, 2023). For institutions of higher education to succeed, educators must be understood and supported to perform to the best of their abilities.

There is current, critical interest in nursing faculty success as it essential to meet national workforce demands for healthcare. Institutions of higher education are under increasing pressure to enroll students in nursing programs and graduate skilled nurses ready for employment. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023) has estimated that 203,700 new registered nurses are needed each year from 2020 to 2026 to meet growing healthcare demands in the United States. A significant challenge to meeting this goal is the shortage of nursing faculty in colleges and universities which limits enrollment in nursing programs (AACN, 2020). Faculty shortages are perpetuated by increasing faculty workloads, academic and practice pay disparities, and staffing shortfalls within academia. These challenges present a stark contrast to faculty goals for academic excellence, satisfaction, and quality student outcomes (Seldomridge et al., 2022). To support and retain nursing faculty, educational leaders are called upon to appreciate the needs of nurse educators including recognizing fatigue and providing supportive resources (Ulmen, & Lloyd, 2021).

The experiences of nursing faculty reflect conditions for higher education educators and professionals throughout academia who indicate increased workload, decreased staffing, and insufficient resources have led to educator burnout (Winfield & Paris, 2022). These challenges influence faculty in academic disciplines throughout higher education with many educators experiencing burnout. Burnout is a condition of prolonged exhaustion including physical and emotional symptoms, a lack of energy, failure to thrive in the workplace, and negative feelings regarding one's job (Gewin, 2021). All faculty contribute significant emotional labor that can lead to burnout. This labor comes in the form of repetitive acts of caring for others, serving simultaneously in multiple demanding roles including teacher, mentor, advisor, and caregiver. This labor is often unrecognized, unpaid, and unappreciated (Lawless, 2018) and as such there is a great need to attend to the physical and mental well-being of educators (Ulmen, & Lloyd, 2021). Understanding faculty experiences will

help institutions recruit and retain more highly needed educators, help educators thrive in their roles, and, subsequently, increase degree completion.

Managing and decreasing workplace stress is of critical concern for faculty and academic leaders (Kenner & Pressler, 2014.) University personnel often focus on meeting students' needs to the exclusion of their own personal and emotional needs. Building relationships, offering support, encouraging engagement, lending a sympathetic ear, mentoring, and of course teaching all require faculty time, focus, energy and caring. All these elements do not come in an endless supply, and unfortunately may lead to faculty burnout and stress. These consequences lead to low morale and faculty retention issues (Ulmen, & Lloyd, 2021). The well-being and effectiveness of educators is essential to supporting student success. To engage students in meaningful learning, educators must feel healthy, safe, and supported.

Purpose

The aim of this study was to increase understanding of the experiences of educators teaching in higher education today. We chose to focus on nursing faculty due to the urgent need to increase the number of nurse educators. Nonetheless, we believe the insights shared here can be applied to faculty experiences across all academic disciplines. Understanding faculty experiences will help institutions recruit and retain more highly needed educators, help educators thrive in their roles, and, thereupon, meet the demand to increase highly skilled graduates trained to meet workforce needs. Specifically, we collected rich descriptions of experiences of stress, changes in pedagogy, and advice educators offer their faculty peers for successfully negotiating the demands of their highly challenging jobs. The following research questions (RQ) were chosen to guide our inquiry. The research team reflected continually on these questions throughout the research process.

RQ1: How are nursing educators experiencing stress?

RQ2: How are nursing educators changing their pedagogical practices including teaching, supervision, advising, and mentoring students?

RQ3: What peer-to-peer advice do nursing educators offer to support one another?

Methods

This research study was reviewed and approved from the Institutional Review Board of the researchers' university (cited under 45 CFR 46.104(d)). An online, cross-sectional survey, consisting of 25 questions including 5 open-ended responses, was developed. The survey was distributed through the technique of snowball sampling (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) with faculty sharing the survey with other faculty through meetings at the campus where the researchers work, a listserv including faculty from universities across the region, and emails sent to colleagues at peer institutions. This approach was used to create a community-based response that was driven by educators providing insights into their experience then passing along the request for participation from one faculty member to another faculty member. This method of survey distribution helps

develop trust among participants and yielded 113 responses. Participants provided consent as part of the survey itself, as the survey was not accessible unless consent was provided. No names were collected throughout the study, with all data collection remaining anonymous. Ninety-one participants completed the full survey, including demographic questions. Most respondents, 72.5%, had twenty or more years of experience in Nursing; 17.6% had 11-20 years of experience; and 9.9% had 0-10 years of experience. While most respondents, 39.5%, reported teaching, supervising, advising, and/or mentoring a caseload of students between 46 and 100 students during a typical fall or spring semester, 28.5% reported student caseloads above 100, and 32% reported caseloads less than 45 students. On average, respondents reported working 48 hours per week during a typical fall or spring semester.

Content analysis, an analytical technique for identifying meanings within qualitative data from a particular group of people (Bismark et al., 2022), was employed to analyze the data. Text IQ (2023) software was used as a starting point for organizing and coding data including labeling text with inductive codes that were later folded into categories. This systematic approach led to the identification of 59 codes, for research question number 1. These codes were then folded into nine categories (see Table 1).

Table 1

Categories for stress

Categories	%	<i>f</i>
Lower engagement	3%	4
Leadership changes	4%	6
Caregiving responsibilities	5%	7
Healthcare concerns	9%	12
Overall increase in daily stress	9%	12
Increased student needs	13%	17
Changes in policy and practice	16%	21
Increased mental health needs	17%	23
Increased demands/workload/expectations	24%	32
	100%	134

For research question number two, 39 inductive codes were identified. From these codes, eight categories emerged (see Table 2).

Table 2

Categories for changes in pedagogy

Categories	%	<i>f</i>
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More communication	4%	4
Providing mental health support	8%	8
More time and preparation needed	10%	10
More effort needed to build relationships and engagement	10%	10
Increased mentoring and individualized support	12%	12
Virtual learning	18%	19
Increased empathy	18%	19
Increased flexibility and creativity	20%	21
	100%	103

Fifty initial codes were identified for research question number three, related to advice from faculty for faculty. As with the other research questions, these codes were condensed into nine categories (see Table 3).

Table 3

Categories for advice

Categories	%	<i>f</i>
Rest	2%	4
Kindness	3%	6
Seek help	3%	7
Emotional support systems	4%	10
Be open to learning and growth	5%	11
Self-awareness and attending to needs	16%	34
Establish boundaries	17%	38
Build relationships and seek mentors	24%	52
Patience and time management	26%	56
	100%	218

After establishing categories, an iterative process of analysis and data reduction was conducted, resulting in the development of themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Verification processes were used throughout the analysis including scrutiny of codes, categories, and themes, as well as sustained reflection on the root causes of the phenomena described. Researchers kept notes, matrices, and memos shared in a common file for repeated access and refinement. Themes were systematically reviewed, enhanced, and compared back to the raw data to ensure fidelity.

Thematic Findings

Thematic findings describe experiences of stress among educators, changes educators are experiencing, and advice faculty offer to their peers for coping with the demands of their highly challenging job (see Table 4).

Table 4

Findings

Themes
Increased amount and complexity of stress arise from multiple-interacting factors
Continuous institutional changes lead to feelings of uncertainty and doubt in leadership
Empathy and compassion are needed... and they are taxing
Pedagogical practices are changing to meet increased student needs
"Practice self-grace" or increased self-compassion
Seeking out and building in time for mentorship is important
Notice and attend to signs of burnout
Limit your schedule and your commitments

Increased Amount and Complexity of Stress Arise from Multiple-Interacting Factors

Rich descriptions of faculty experiences described multiple stressors coalescing to produce heightened and complex feelings of stress. While faculty overall reported higher stress levels since the start of the pandemic, what stood out in the data was the way in which multiple stress factors built upon one another. For example, a faculty member noted that it is not just that "students have more learning needs" but also that there are "fewer staff available on campus and fewer resources to provide referrals too." Collectively this made needing to meet deepening student needs highly stressful. Similarly, when describing work-life balance, faculty noted that it was not just that they had childcare responsibilities, but they were also, for example, caring for an aging parent. Driving children and parents to appointments and meeting other commitments necessitates working on grading at odd hours and then losing sleep. The faculty member explained, "It feels like the line between work and home life is significantly blurred. In order to keep up with email communications, I answer emails way into the evening so that I don't get too far behind information of communications." It was rare that faculty described one key stressor, rather, multiple stressors were described in deep relationship to one another.

Continuous Institutional Changes Leads to Feelings of Uncertainty and Doubt in Leadership

Elevated levels of stress were also ascribed to changes in institutional policy, shifts in institutional leadership, and the need to modify practices to meet evolving policies and leadership expectations. Furthermore, faculty described how experiencing perpetual change leads to feelings of uncertainty about their institution, institutional and programmatic leadership, and their own roles at the university. An experienced faculty member noted that she would like to see "transformational leadership that role models behavior and inspires other to be

their best self." Others called for "leadership that supports the faculty as much as they support the student" and "authentic support from leadership." Rapid change and poor communication from the institution contributed to uncertainty and confusion. An educator commented that innovation was frequently stifled and that there is a need for "Leadership that encourages and allows for innovation and failure and is less rigid." It was shared that "more support and time" would be beneficial for negotiating change because "we are stretched so thin between classes with students who need a lot of support, performing clinical duties, and doing our research."

Empathy and Compassion are Needed... and They are Taxing

The call for increased empathy and compassion throughout the data was clear and consistent. This was expressed as needed across all relationships in the academic context including student-faculty, faculty-faculty, student-student, and administration-faculty. Empathy was noted as important for creating inclusive environments for work and learning. Diverse students exhibited unique needs requiring individualized care and support. As one faculty member described she has "had to send more students for counseling; more students are asking for accommodations, in the hospital setting I am often teaching both the RN (who is brand new) and the student." In addition to the calls for increased empathy and compassion, it was repeatedly acknowledged that empathy and compassion are "not easy" requiring time, patience, and energy. Several respondents shared that they feel "guilty" for not being compassionate enough or because they were too exhausted to be empathetic to the needs of others. One faculty member shared the need to "Practice empathy and compassion [and] ...bring humanity back to the work culture" while also sharing that it is important to not "budge on the boundaries you set to maintain balance." Many faculty were wrestling with the challenges between what they believe they should be (empathetic and compassionate) and how challenging it can be that way day after day. In the face of this complexity, it is possible to "let self-doubts eat up your mood and time to the detriment of work and home."

Pedagogical Practices are Changing to Meet Increased Student Needs

Pedagogical practices have shifted including changes to teaching, supervision, advising, and mentoring students. To better meet student needs, faculty have been called upon to provide more compassion as well as increased mental health support and learning resources as part of their teaching practice. An educator described, "Students have much greater need for mental health screenings and referrals than ever before. Their baseline level of stress is very high. Students who were educated in online environments for pre-requisite courses by and large have huge gaping deficits in their sciences knowledge base. This requires extra teaching, mentoring, tutoring." During the pandemic, and in the time since the height of the pandemic, faculty have seen changes in student needs and expectations regarding flexibility such as elasticity on assignments, deadlines, scheduling, and course participation. For example, an instructor shared that she has changed her pedagogical approach: "I tend to be more flexible with deadlines and due dates for my students since the

pandemic. I recognize that many are going through difficult things, and that having a little more grace and understanding is of importance." Being flexible with course requirements was described as a way to act compassionately towards students. Similar to how faculty wrestled with how to be empathetic and compassionate when fatigued, faculty wrestled with how to be accessible and meet student needs while also ensuring students take responsibility:

Balance your availability with your students with time away from the computer/phone/office. While being accessible and available for your students is important, it shouldn't be as a detriment to your own mental, physical and emotional health. Remember that you can't care more about a student's grade or success than they do. We are facilitators and mentors, but at the end of the day, students need to be engaged and put forth the effort.

"Practice Self Grace" or Increased Self-Compassion

Nurse educators recommended practicing self-compassion. They offered several strategies to do so including cultivating patience for both the self and others, reflecting upon and identifying one's needs, attending to those needs, and when necessary, practicing self-forgiveness. A faculty member recommended to peers:

Be kind to yourself as much as to others. We all fail at some point - we all get rejected from a journal or a conference abstract. It's part of our career and should be normalized as such and not viewed as a disappointment. Give time to yourself and your family. Turn off your email and be present with them as you are present with your students.

Others urged their peers to "recognize the signs of burn out in you and seek help as you need it. Recognize your human flaws and build self-compassion and self-care into those instances" and "don't be too hard on yourself. When things do not go as you want, take a deep breathe, and regroup."

Seeking Out and Building in Time for Mentorship is Important

Respondents repeatedly described the importance of seeking mentorship and building a relationship with a mentor for pedagogical support as well as support beyond the classroom. Educators spoke of the benefits of peer observations, co-teaching, and collaboration. A faculty member recommended: "Make sure that you build mentorship into your professional world for advice as you need it." Having someone with more experience who faculty can turn to in a time of need was described as imperative to successful practice as an educator. As one individual shared, "Remember that there is always someone who is either in your shoes or has been in your shoes. That we are here to talk to you if you need, whenever you need." Mentorship and collaborations with peer faculty was articulated as beneficial for asking questions, seeking guidance on syllabus development and instructional practices as well as managing priorities, decision making, managing emotions and politics, and setting reasonable expectations.

Notice and Attend to Signs of Burnout

The importance of noticing and attending to signs of compassion-fatigue and burnout was a key pattern in the data. A participant emphasized, "You need to take care of yourself before you can take care of your students! There can be burnout in the classroom... so be aware of it. There will be students that are so needy that they can suck you dry, and there are others that you don't even realize are tugging at your heartstrings until your heart is on your sleeve! You need to be self-aware, make time for yourself each day, renew, and rejuvenate. Make each day a new beginning!" To combat burnout and fatigue, recommendations were made for prioritizing as well as selecting and limiting activities: "Prioritize exercise, eat well and rest/sleep well... be conscious about time, commitment, and the learning curve of new commitments... prioritize family members and friends as they are our everlasting source of internal motivations... know oneself -stressors, triggers for alcohol or drugs, stress-relievers, emotional pain triggers." As one has to make selections about how to spend their limited time, one nurse educator recommended, "Find time each day to do something for yourself, like a walk, listening to music, or spending time with your friends and family so you can be reenergized in doing your work."

Limit Your Schedule and Your Commitments

Faculty consistently recommended employing intentional strategies to manage one's calendar and to not "over-commit." As one participant clearly shared, "It's OK to say no." It was also encouraged to be aware of the "chronic sense of urgency":

Be mindful about the chronic sense of urgency that is often misplaced where faculty and chairs place urgency on all aspects even when it is not critical (If my hair is no longer on fire, I have to reignite it to appear I am busy). Attempt to mitigate the noise around having a sense of urgency when it is unnecessary.

Elaborations included recommendations to "set up a calendar and don't over-commit" and to "schedule time to yourself and block it on your calendar." Many respondents also described the emotional labor involved in calendaring and scheduling decisions. It can be difficult, especially when you are a professional caregiver, to take time for yourself and not feel bad about it. A faculty member implored her peers, "To not feel guilty for wanting work-life balance. Learn strategies for time management so you can be successful while maintaining "your time." Another shared the recommendation for a peer to "Place limits and boundaries on their time. Do things at work that are fun and stimulate your intellectual growth. Be available for students within limits (work hours). Use after hours and weekends to catch up on a few things but mainly to recharge and refresh." One faculty member said the goal is to achieve "harmony" with one's schedule and that "tapping out when necessary" is a good strategy.

Discussion

Our findings are consistent with literature on educator success, and they offer novel insights that could be beneficial to ongoing discussions related to faculty burnout. Findings support recommendations for colleges and universities to advance conditions for positive work-life balance (Ruth-Sahd & Grim, 2021). Study findings included the benefits of mentorship, collaborating with peer educators, and building partnerships with other educators. This aligns with recommendations to collaborate with faculty peers to enhance one's teaching skills (Suart, 2023) and use co-teaching to provide optimal learning for students (Scherer et al., 2020). Furthermore, findings align with literature on compassion among nurses and nurse educators, compassion-fatigue, and self-compassion.

Compassion has long been associated with the nursing profession and for nursing educators teaching the skills of compassionate practice is seen as a critical pedagogical objective (Tierney et al., 2019). In *Compassion: An Investigation into The Experience of Nursing Faculty*, nursing faculty are described as working to alleviate the suffering of others and through this action "are willing to go beyond what is expected and give a gift of self, time, or actions to the person in need" (Peters, 2006, p.43). Compassion is closely related to caring and can be said to be the cornerstone of nursing as well as education. Caring is one of the main reasons people pursue a career in nursing, along with a desire to make a difference in others' lives (Evans, 2018). Beyond the care of others, faculty's efforts to create a compassionate learning environment has even been seen to influence whether a student will persist to degree completion (Henderson et al., 2019). When nurses work in a caring and compassionate environment, they are more likely to act with care and compassion. Nurses report positive mood increases after receiving compassion from their colleagues, which is also connected to improved job performance (Chu, 2016). Nurse educators are an important part of creating an environment where nurses can be open and sustain dialogue that can contribute to a group's well-being and compassion (Strube et al., 2018). Beyond nursing, faculty across disciplines are urged to increase their sensitivity to students' needs and perspectives, to provide differentiated pathways, and facilitate collaboration to advanced inclusive learning environments in higher education (Lin & Kenette, 2021).

This focus on compassion does not come without a cost; compassion-fatigue has become a challenging issue affecting the nursing profession and has been identified as a precursor to burnout (Lanier, 2019). Compassion-fatigue was first defined in 1995 as emotional strain developed through interacting with a traumatized individual (Figley, 1995). Its definition has since evolved to an extreme state of tension and preoccupation, where the emotional pain and/or physical distress of those being helped creates a secondary traumatic stress for the caregiver. This secondary traumatic stress converges with cumulative burnout, and a state of physical and mental exhaustion occurs, causing a depleted ability to cope with one's everyday environment (Cocker & Joss, 2016). Recent research has brought attention to the need for higher education faculty today to employ strategies communicating compassion to help universities become more trauma-informed (Wells, 2023). Compassion-fatigue can, as described by a study participant, prevent

educators from building “true and deeper human connections” and can be a barrier to cultivating “collegiality and build[ing] trust.” It is important to identify compassion fatigue among educators and efforts need to be made to alleviate compassion fatigue (Ruth-Sahd & Grim, 2021). Compassion fatigue appears over time, and it is progressive. It is not only possible but desirable to identify this condition as early as possible, when an educator is at risk for the condition, and then take steps to lessen the consequences.

It is important to note that compassion fatigue, along with other workplace risks and stressors, can be minimized significantly by self-care (Martin et al., 2020). Because environmental circumstances influence whether individuals act with compassion; universities must foster an environment supportive of faculty so that they can provide and engage in compassionate interactions with students. Those suffering from compassion-fatigue continue to care and continue to give but do this from a state of depletion. Self-care, if used on a regular basis, has been identified as a key strategy to help faculty reconnect to their sense of purpose and to their profession (Velez-Cruz & Holstun, 2022). As an educator in the study described, “In order to not only survive and succeed in this career, you must incorporate self-care and compassion into every day. Develop coping strategies for daily stressors.” To avoid fatigue or come back from fatigue, self-compassion is a powerful skill. Self-compassion is defined as being nonjudgmental and kind to oneself especially during challenging times (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion can influence the ability of nurses to be compassionate to others (Steen, 2022). Healthcare educators are considered essential to teaching students self-compassion and developing compassion for others. Developing self-compassion among faculty contributes to a compassionate approach towards others, fewer symptoms of burnout and/or compassion-fatigue, better sleep quality, and improved job satisfaction (Vaillancourt & Wasylkiw, 2020).

Our study contributes novel insights to the ongoing discussion of faculty burn-out, well-being, and retention. Eu and Brooke (2022) found that the faculty experience may now be appreciated as “BP” or “before pandemic” and “AP” or “after Pandemic” (p.51) with AP faculty experiences of burnout forever influenced by the global phenomenon that shook education. AP, faculty have reported decreased well-being, weaker connection to students, and reduced enjoyment in teaching (Schwab et al., 2022). Burnout is of grave concern as it can negatively influence cognitive, emotional, and physical performance as well as significantly increase daily stress (Khammissa et al., 2022). Velez-Cruz and Holstun (2022), emphasize that faculty strategies are needed to ease burnout and secondary traumatic stress. Our findings reply directly to this need by including practical tools individuals can employ in their day-to-day work. These tools can provide hope in the face of faculty burnout. Practicing self-compassion, seeking mentorship, noticing and attending to signs of compassion-fatigue, and managing time commitments are forms of self-management faculty can use to protect against, and possibly return from, burnout. While the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (2024) reports that faculty and staff retention rates have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, the data is trending in that direction. Increasing faculty awareness of our recommended practices can help with the continued pandemic recovery.

Observations and Limitations

While clear thematic findings emerged regarding advice from and for nurse educators, not all educator experiences were the same nor did all educators have recommendations to share. Not everyone in our study felt like they could give advice; for example, one educator revealed: "I struggle with this myself so don't think I can give advice." Another faculty member reported that their current work environment limits what they feel they can advise to peers saying that the question about advice giving was "difficult to answer as my leadership does not fully support faculty who are trying to self-care." Additionally, while most faculty reported becoming more flexible to meet current demands, one described a need to become firmer: "I am much more prescriptive. My syllabus is longer, outlining requirements for students- including class attendance, expectations for participation in class. I am less tolerant of students." Most respondents described change as complex with both negative and positive aspects. However, this was not the case with all respondents and one person described changes as extremely positive:

I have a better perspective on life now. First, I look at what's best for my students as well as myself. My value of people increased during COVID 19. I am more patient and understanding of other people's needs. I actually give myself permission to do certain things for myself on a regular basis. I have a better overall health perspective in what I eat and how I care for myself. Somethings that I did or ate before COVID, I don't eat or do them anymore. I eat more plant-based foods. I actually went through transformation during COVID.

Overall, there was natural variation among the data set. Still, the data collected produced clear themes supported by abundant, rich descriptions in the text.

Conclusion

Peer-to-peer support and guidance can be a powerful tool. As multiple players, on and off campuses, engage in conversations about the current state and future of education, it is critical to keep the educator voice front and center. While there is evidence that faculty are struggling with mental health (Urbina-Garcia, 2020), there is also evidence that faculty can be wise guides to other faculty members capable of sharing lessons-learned through practice that can help others excel as educators (Talbot & Mercer, 2018).

This study sought to understand nursing faculty experiences in effort to help institutions recruit and retain more highly needed educators, help educators thrive in their roles, and meet the demand to increase degree completion. To this end, this study provided descriptions of ways in which faculty are currently experiencing heightened levels of stress while negotiating multiple changes in the workplace. Viewing educators as experts on their own experiences, this study invited nursing educators to offer their own wisdom for navigating this challenging time in the profession. Recommendations include practicing self-compassion, seeking mentorship, noticing and attending to signs of compassion-fatigue or burnout, and managing time commitments with a goal not to overcommit. The study aligns with

insights on educator needs for compassion, concerns regarding compassion-fatigue, and calls for enhanced self-compassion. In the words of a faculty member, "In order to not only survive and succeed in this career, you must incorporate self-care and compassion into every day. Develop coping strategies for daily stressors." Educators, administrators, campus stakeholders, and clinical placements can use these insights to better support the success of faculty. Furthermore, individual educators can use this guidance to reflect on their own activities, make enhancements, and enact change. In a time when faculty are being asked to do more, from new pedagogical approaches to caring for the individual needs of students (Murphy et al., 2021), compassion as well as patience, support, and collaboration are critical to helping educators thrive.

Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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