DNP or PHD: WHICH ONE IS FOR ME?
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Background: The entry-level degree for Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) is shifting from a master’s degree to a doctoral degree. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and National Research Council support the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree. AACN has adopted the goal that entry-level APRNs be doctorate prepared by 2015. Practice-focused doctoral degree programs in nursing are not new, yet these recommendations have awarded them increased attention. Still, there is a knowledge gap among nurses regarding the two doctorate programs, the unique role each plays in our healthcare system and how.

Purpose: The purpose of this poster is to educate Registered Nurses (RNs) and APRNs on the DNP and the Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing (PhD) programs, specifically how they apply to the Neonatal APRN. The poster highlights the benefits and requirements of both, and it seeks to help those contemplating a doctorate degree choose the program most likely to satisfy their goals.

Method/Design & Procedure: A literature review was conducted on the history and characteristics of the DNP and the PhD in nursing using CINAHL database. A survey was created and posted on NANN listerv. Data was gathered from RN/APRNs who had obtained, or were currently working toward a doctoral degree. Telephone interviews were conducted with doctorally prepared APRNs focusing on the decision-making process and their personal experiences. A decision tree was created.

Sample Description: 48 RNs and APRNs who are active members of The National Association of Neonatal Nurses (NANN). All respondents to survey have obtained or are currently working toward a doctoral degree.

Results: Both PhD and DNP students cited teaching at the university level and translating research into practice as a reason for choosing their program. Most respondents who wanted to become an expert clinical nurse and leader pursued a DNP. Most respondents who wanted to conduct original research pursued a PhD. Other findings included that the DNP generally took less than three years to complete while the PhD in Nursing generally took 3-5 years to complete. Additionally, on average, the PhD in Nursing program was more expensive, but PhD candidates received more funding.

Conclusion: Applicants need a clear understanding of their personal goals and opportunities each degree offers. Factors such as time to complete the degree and costs are significant for the decision. The information gathered from our survey suggests that if your priority is to conduct original research you should strongly consider a PhD. Conversely, our survey results suggest that if your main goal is to become an expert clinical nurse leader, the DNP is more fitting.