



By Ken Dion
and Mary Smolenski

Reinventing Your Resume

Electronically Documenting Your Career

W

hat are professional portfolios and why are they so important?

A professional portfolio contains all of the information traditionally found on a resume and includes summary information and documentation about education, licensure, employment history, and the like. They've been discussed in professional circles for years, but recent events, including the nursing shortage and the adoption by hospitals to pursue ANCC Magnet Recognition® designation have driven an increasing interest in them. There are benefits to be gained by the individuals, health care organizations, and institutions by using the professional portfolio as a competency management tool. By starting a portfolio while still in nursing school, students get a head start in developing and maintaining their curriculum vitae and documenting professional competency in real time.

What is a Professional Portfolio?

There are several important factors that make the portfolio different from the traditional resume.

First, the portfolio contains supporting documentation traditionally presented on a resume. This includes, but is not limited to, actual copies of educational transcripts, licenses, and letters of recommendation (Bell, 2001). More subjective documents such as case logs and examples of care plans, which demonstrate competency in the art of nursing,

can be included as part of the professional portfolio. Additional documentation includes narratives reflecting on the individual's nursing practice. The portfolio is a reflective document which demonstrates life-long learning and continuing professional competence (Monson, 2005).

Electronic Advantages

The premise of an electronic health record is to capture – cradle to grave – all of the clinical conditions and interventions over the course of a patient's life, no matter where they occur.

The professional portfolio follows a similar premise. The electronic professional portfolio is the repository of all professional development data found on a resume or curriculum vitae (CV) along with all of the supporting documentation acquired over the course of an individual's career.

The use of a web-based portfolio allows the professional nurse to document professional development in near real time, decreasing the chance for omission of important activities. How many of us make mental notes to “write something down” or “update my resume



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later?” Capture of data close to the origin of its generation increases the probability of its retention.

Using a web-based portfolio not only allows the individual to have a secure repository of vital information, but the ability to be proactive in professional development through electronically generated alerts and reminders.

Data Security

In the days of paper portfolios, early advocates recommended placing all important documents related to professional development in a shoe box so that they would be handy when needed. Recent catastrophic weather events like tornados in the midwest and hurricanes Rita and Katrina in the southern U.S. clearly demonstrate that a shoe box is not the way to protect a lifetime of professional documentation. You're working hard for your license, as you will for your certifications and further education – protect them!

Whenever possible, professional documentation must be backed up electronically.

To do so:

- If possible, scan all documents that do not already exist in an electronic format, such as copies of licenses and certifications, transcripts and other important documents.
- Save multiple copies of these documents, along with those that exist in electronic format such as resumes or CVs, patient teaching materials, case studies, and reflective documents. Transfer them to CDs or other available portable electronic media.
- Place an electronic copy of important documents in a safety deposit box at the very least.

An alternative and more flexible approach is to develop a web-based professional portfolio.

The ubiquitous nature of the internet allows the nursing student or nurse to provide updates to the professional portfolio in real time,

decreasing the probability of lost or forgotten information associated with traditional portfolios. Real-time data capture facilitates reflective journaling and encourages the capture of reflection on practice. An additional benefit is the decrease in time spent “updating the resume” which is often only done when a milestone such as evaluation or an interview for a new position is impending. With real-time data capture, a resume or CV is always up to date with the most recent information.

An electronic portfolio can provide benefit beyond acting solely as a repository of information. The portfolio is a living document and it can provide the owner with messages and alerts to such things as a license or certification expiring.

It also enables the sharing of a portfolio tailored specifically to the recipient. In many cases this may be what Dennison-Donohoe (2007) refers to as a “Best Work” portfolio. Ultimately, multiple portfolios

can be created from the single repository of professional development data by selecting the specific elements to be included in a particular portfolio. Just as artists pick the pieces of art to place in their portfolio when seeking a show, the professional nurse will include those professional development activities to include in the portfolio based on the recipient, e.g., a manager for evaluation, peer for collaboration or perspective employer.

Nurses who assemble their professional portfolios will have a differentiating factor when competing with nurses who only submit resumes when applying for a new position.

The professional portfolio is becoming the expectation in many organizations in which nursing leadership seeks to develop and record continuing professional competency.

Licensure and Certification

Several states are evaluating the processes by which continuing professional competency is evaluated. The days of simply completing continuing education courses for the purposes of license renewal are drawing to a close. State legislatures and boards of nursing are considering revamping re-licensure processes—portfolio evaluation is one method being considered.

The International Society of Genetics in Nursing (ISONG) has granted its certification by portfolio, and other professional organizations are considering it.

Professional organizations with limited membership are looking toward portfolios as a mechanism for recognition and credentialing to replace examinations which may be difficult for them to handle. Several organizations are using portfolios for renewal of certification such as the Wound, Ostomy, Continence Certification group and the Credentialing and Competence Institute (CCI). See www.wocncb.org/recert/ and www.cci-institute.org/cert_cnrc.aspx.

Hospitals and Healthcare Organizations

Healthcare organizations are also seeing the benefit that professional portfolios offer in recruitment and retention. Health care organizations will be able to better evaluate candidates by considering some of the subjective data in their portfolios. This greater insight into the candidate will result in improved organizational hiring. This improvement in hiring will result in a better fit at



the time of candidate selection and ultimately result in decreased turnover and associated recruitment cost.

The uniformity of data collection in an electronic portfolio can assist the individual and the organization in the process of ongoing professional evaluation. The individual can use the vehicle to track progress on a roadmap such as a clinical ladder. Organizations benefit from the ease of data aggregation for evaluation and professional development planning.

Electronic professional portfolios can ease the credentialing process. Advanced practice nurses (APNs) must complete the credentialing

process at their facilities in order to get privileges and be authorized to practice. Paperless processes can ease the review by credentialing boards.

The implementation of electronic professional portfolios will also assist organizations seeking ANCC Magnet Recognition® status. Information needed to complete much of the Magnet documentation is traditionally housed in disparate information systems if it is housed in an information system at all.

Collection of Magnet® data can be cumbersome at best and the difficulty is further exacerbated when the information is not in an electronic format. Having an electronic portfolio system will greatly ease the difficulty in obtaining information such as “highest degree obtained,” the “highest level of degree,” and “quantity in a particular unit.” Additionally, the professional nurse has the ability to assure that the organization has the most up-to date data by keeping his/her portfolio current.

Accreditation

Accreditation or recognition from a wide variety of accrediting bodies is an integral part of doing business for today’s healthcare organization. Data required by surveyors can be extensive and is often located in a variety of different systems in the healthcare organization. The electronic professional portfolio acts as the single repository for all professional development activities and draws information from the appropriate feeder systems as well as from individual practitioners who may be in possession of important information not contained in any system. With an electronic portfolio in place, data can be aggregated at a surveyors request with just a few clicks of the mouse.

Nursing Education

Academia will also experience many benefits as a result of implementing a web-based portfolio system. Many nursing education programs

are including portfolios as a required element of course work in order to better position their students for employment post graduation (Serembus, 2000; Corcoran & Nicholson, 2004). Nurse educators in these programs can lead by example and demonstrate their commitment to life-long learning to their students by using their portfolios as an example of what the professional portfolio has evolved to today.

Faculty can use the electronic portfolios in making decisions about the clinical placement of students. Feedback from instructors and mentors at clinical sites should be included in the student's portfolio. Consideration could be given to course equivalency methods in students' portfolios. For example, documentation supporting significant involvement in the National Student Nurses' Association might count for project credit in a nursing leadership course.

Nursing faculty must produce significant documentation for evaluation and application for tenure. A well developed electronic portfolio will not only serve to ease the process burden but also ease back strain: imagine *not* hauling a ton of binders to an evaluation!

Finally, nursing education programs are subject to a variety of accreditation processes both internal and external. Portfolio assembly for each faculty member is usually a part of this process. All the benefits of data sharing and aggregation experienced by the health care organization undergoing accreditation would be experienced by the nursing education program in much the same fashion.

To sum up, the professional portfolio is a crucial tool by which nursing professionals can demonstrate life-long learning and the qualitative nature of the art of nursing. Enabling technologies such as the web-based portfolio will ease the burden of demonstrating competency in the nursing profession and shape the future of nursing technology. ©



The Professional Portfolio Documenting Life-Long Learning: The Key to Your Future Success in Nursing

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Ken Dion, MSN, MBA, RN, served as the 1990-1991 NSNA Secretary/Treasurer and is CEO of Decision Critical, Inc., which hosts NSNA's Leadership University website. Mr. Dion has been a long-time supporter of NSNA and FNSNA and currently serves as the Treasurer of the Foundation of the NSNA.



Mary C. Smolenski, EdD, FNP, FAANP, CAE, has worked in clinical practice, nursing education, government and private sector consulting, the military, and in association work. She has worked over 25 years as a certified

family nurse practitioner and currently serves as the Director of Certification Services for the American Nurses Credentialing Center.