



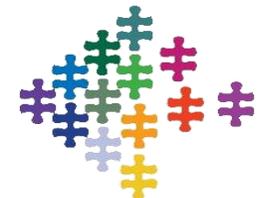
National Institute  
of Nursing Research



## Challenges at Midcareer



Joan K. Austin, PhD, RN, FAAN  
Distinguished Professor Emerita, Indiana University School of Nursing



# Challenges at Midcareer

## Dealing with challenges at midcareer

- Common challenges
- Strategies for moving research forward
- Strategies for sustaining optimism



# Challenges at Midcareer

- Relief – achieved tenure, but
  - Higher work expectations in teaching and service
    - More leadership
      - at institution
      - in professional organizations
    - Greater demand to mentor others
    - More teaching responsibility



# Challenges at Midcareer

- Research career challenges
  - Less attention
  - Less funding targeted for midcareer scientists
  - Fewer honors and awards available at midcareer
  - Can reach a plateau with research progress



# Challenges At Midcareer

- Interviews with three nursing research deans
  - Relaxing too long after achieving tenure
  - Taking demanding administrative positions
  - Failing to show progress in teaching and service
  - Working on one grant at a time and becoming lost when it does not work out
  - Research stalls, becomes discouraged, and quits doing research



# Strategies for Addressing Challenges

- Have clear expectations for achieving promotion
- Seek mentoring
  - Re-evaluate your strengths and weaknesses
  - Create a new individual development plan
- Maximize resources
- Increase research activity
- Fight discouragement



# Maximizing Resources

- Supplement your knowledge and research skills
  - At the university
  - Professional Organizations
  - Plan strategic sabbaticals to expand skills
  - Travel to spend time with investigators who are using methods you want to learn
  - Network with potential collaborators



# Maximizing Resources

- Volunteer to serve as a grant reviewer
  - Gain insight into the review process
  - Learn how to frame persuasive arguments
  - See examples of responses that were responsive or unresponsive to prior critiques
  - Learn from hearing other critiques
  - Opportunity to network within the scientific community



# Increase Research Activity

- Have a mindset of doing more
  - Grant proposals
  - New co-investigators
  - New funding sources
- View learning research skills as being continuous
  - Learn about new areas
  - Develop new skills
  - Identify new collaborators
  - Network with others in a new area



# Strategies for Moving Research Forward

- Advocate for resources at your institution
  - Ask administration for money to pay for consultation
  - Identify speakers to invite to visit your school who can consult with you
  - Seek internal funds for pilot work in a new area
  - Get external reviews on grant proposals



# Seek Supplemental Funding Sources

- Meet with university research office to explore funding opportunities
- Regularly monitor funding sources
  - CTSA
  - School and University
  - State government
  - Professional Organizations
  - Disease focused foundations
  - Private foundations



# Fight Discouragement

- Take care of yourself physically
  - Know your pitfalls
  - Set up a strategy that helps you comply
- Take care of yourself emotionally
  - Plan pleasurable events
  - Reward yourself
  - Avoid negative self-talk
  - Manage your anger



# 4 C's of Hardiness

Committed

Be **C**ommitted to what you do

Control

Believe you can **C**ontrol some things

Change

See **C**hange as offering opportunity

Connected

Stay **C**onected to your community



# Monitor Your Inner Thoughts

- Do not overgeneralize or ruminate
- Do not assume a paranoid explanation
- Confront irrational beliefs
- Be persistent
  - Think of yourself as a long-distance runner
  - When things go wrong, keep moving forward
  - Make one step each day that moves you forward in one area – make it a habit



# Talk With Colleagues

- Select the right people to talk to
- When things are not going well,
  - Talk to people who are successful
  - Avoid people who might encourage you to give up on your goals
- Projects always get better with feedback
  - You may never learn to like feedback, but always accept it graciously
  - You can decide if you want to follow it



# Reframe Being Too Busy

- Leading a full life means that you always have a full desk
  - View a full desk as a problem of success
  - View having a lot to do as meaning that your work and advice is needed and valued
  - View challenges as part of having a full career



# Summary

- When facing midcareer challenges
  - Develop a new plan to build on your strengths and to address weaknesses
  - Maximize resources for increasing your knowledge and skills
  - Increase efforts to seek funding
  - Be proactive in fighting discouragement

