

## Defining, Maintaining Professionalism in Nursing

Professionalism in nursing means different things to different people. For some, it is a nurse's appearance.

Although the nursing caps and white uniforms may be gone, today's nurses wear neat scrubs and comfortable shoes. Some define professionalism as a nurse's knowledge, skills set and how care is delivered to patients. Others view professionalism as the continuous journey to improve nursing practices, the workplace and nursing's future.

What is your definition of nursing professionalism? Once you have your definition, there are several ways to grow and maintain your professionalism in nursing.

- Read professional journals. Discuss what you learn with co-workers.
- Attend seminars, conferences and other workshops for continuing education.
- Join committees or planning groups at work.
- Volunteer in your community.
- Take academic classes to continue your formal education.
- Become certified in your area of practice.
- Join a professional nursing organization.
- Further develop your role as a preceptor.
- Mentor other nurses to grow and maintain their careers.

## Resources

Bryan, S. (2006, Feb. Mar. Apr.). To be or not to be: professionalism in nursing.

*The Maryland Nurse*, p. 3.

Myrick, F. & Yonge, M. (2005). *Nursing preceptorship: connecting practice and education*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.

## Professionalism Involves Serving as a Role Model

As a preceptor, it is your job to model the role of a professional. Because preceptees often view their preceptor as the person who they are most likely to identify with professionally, it is the preceptor's responsibility to model professional attitudes and behaviors. To fulfill this responsibility, Myrick & Yonge (2005) suggest the following.

- Demonstrate a strong sense of commitment to your role as a nurse and a preceptor.
- Interact with colleagues, patients/families, physicians and other members of the health care team adeptly and sensitively.
- Be knowledgeable about the work you do.
- Show respect for your patients and co-workers.
- Adhere to ethical principles in carrying out your nursing care.
- Foster a spirit of inquiry, critical thinking and reflection when working with preceptees and colleagues.

As a preceptor, your actions demonstrate professionalism. Preceptees are likely to model their own behaviors based on their observations of your commitment to your work and how your demeanor reflects this commitment. Even the little things ... the way you dress, the way you wear your hair, how much jewelry you wear, chewing gum ... all of these become the pattern that preceptees may follow.

Preceptees are constantly observing your interactions with families and others on the health care team. When these interactions reflect a sense of professionalism, the preceptee may learn to model this behavior. As a nurse, it is your responsibility to be knowledgeable about your patients and how to best care for them. It also is your responsibility to share this knowledge with preceptees and teach them how to find information on their own.

Professionals respect their patients and co-workers and practice in an ethical manner. Preceptees notice if you introduce yourself to others, if your name tag is visible, how you address your patients and if you are respectful of their concerns. Allow yourself to be open to questions and demonstrate practice wisdom when working with preceptees because it enables them to be free of anxiety about questioning and to develop their own critical thinking abilities.

Preceptees usually want to model their preceptors. As a preceptor, you want to demonstrate the attitudes and behaviors that show a strong commitment to being a professional nurse. Be sure to discuss professionalism with your preceptees and ask them what professional behaviors they have observed in you.