

## Nurses Return to Acute Care

You have been asked to precept another nurse. This time, she is an experienced nurse who has not worked in a hospital setting recently.

What does this mean? Let me introduce you to one of these nurses.

*Julie realized it had been a long time since she had even considered what she wanted to do for herself. For so many years, her focus had been her children, her home and her husband.*

*She remembered struggling with the decision to give up her position at the hospital after the birth of her third child. She loved being a nurse, its daily challenges, the rewards she received from patients' smiles and the recognition from her unit manager and co-workers.*

*It was a good time in her life; could it happen again? It had been such a long time, but Julie maintained an intense pride in her profession and, in the safe seclusion of her thoughts, often wondered if she could do it again.*

Julie, like many other returning RNs, attended a refresher program consisting of several weeks of classes, labs and clinicals to help refresh her knowledge of physiology, pharmacology and lab values. Julie sharpened her critical thinking skills in clinical and simulation settings and practiced key psychomotor skills.

When the returning nurse begins the final portion of the journey back to patient care, this is where you come in to begin the preceptor relationship.

## Precept Nurses with Words, Actions, Professionalism

Returning nurses like Julie bring numerous strengths — the perspective that comes from living life, deeper self-awareness, a myriad of life experiences and a clear vision on their personal strengths, limitations and professional goals. They also have several fears. Can I learn all the new technology? How will I be able to work 12 hour shifts? Will I remember everything I need to provide safe patient care? To help facilitate a successful return to providing safe and effective patient care, please consider the following.

**Your words.** What you say to a returning RN who is new to your hospital carries a great deal of significance. Your words have the power to build up and encourage the returning nurse or, if poorly selected, to diminish the returning nurse's self-esteem and banish the RN from our profession. Be aware of how important your feedback is to this returning RN and use the tools that have been created to provide objective and timely feedback on the RN's performance.

**Your actions.** The returning nurse is watching you to learn from your interaction with patients and their families, your computer entry, your psychomotor skills and your part on the team. Your preceptee is taking your cue on the protocols and procedures, as well as the unwritten social aspects of the unit.

**Your professionalism.** Similar to a new graduate, the returning nurse wants to do everything right and avoid making any mistakes. The returning RN will watch you carefully to learn the "proper" way to perform skills and care. The patient care experiences they have with you can affect them in two ways. It will either support the reality that nurses are an integral part of the health care team and do have a say in the care that is provided. Or, it will make them more likely to believe that most nurses are overworked and underappreciated.

There is so much more to precepting a nurse than can be represented in the knowledge base and psychomotor skills used in providing quality care. As a preceptor, you are one of the links for this RN returning to the nursing profession. What will they see of themselves through you? Will they see themselves as someone who no longer has "what it takes" and who is no longer valued and wanted in the patient care arena? Or, will they see the caring, competent and integral member of the health care team they strive to be?

Thank you for agreeing to serve in an important preceptor role for a returning RN.

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