Delegation Do’s & Don’ts

Why don’t nurses delegate?
Perhaps because it takes time to do it effectively. Nurses may be inexperienced, lack trust, or have insecurities and concerns about delegating. Others do not want to lose control of the tasks or may fear overburdening others.

Learn to use delegation to ensure safe, high quality care for your patients. Here are some tips:
- Select appropriate tasks to delegate to your preceptee.
- Don’t say or hint that you doubt the preceptee’s ability.
- Don’t assume that he or she knows what you want.
- Don’t surreptitiously take back a task if your preceptee is slow at completing it.
- Help if needed, but don’t deny the preceptee the chance to learn by interfering too much.
- If there are issues with something you have delegated, have the preceptee come up with a plan and several solutions.
- Try not to do “magic” by stepping in to solve a task with which the preceptee is struggling, leaving the preceptee wondering why you didn’t offer assistance earlier and/or not feeling good about his or her skills, abilities and resources.

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Situation:
Delegation and the Preceptor

Background:
Delegation, the process for a nurse to direct another person to perform nursing-related tasks and activities, involves entrusting another with a task for which the nurse remains ultimately responsible, and is a planned and organized sharing of responsibility that requires careful structuring. The goal is to ensure safe, high quality care. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing and the American Nurses Association have issued a Joint Statement on Delegation (July 2006, http://www.ncsbn.org).

Key principals of delegation from the Joint Statement include:
- The RN is responsible and accountable for providing patient care through the nurse’s practice act.
- The RN directs care and determines the appropriate use of any assistant providing direct patient care.
- The RN may delegate components of care but not the nursing process itself—such as assessment, planning and evaluation.
- Communication must be a two way street.
- The RN uses critical thinking and professional judgment when following the “Five Rights of Delegation.”
  - Right task
  - Right circumstances
  - Right person
  - Right directions and communication*
  - Right supervision and evaluation*
*Key when using delegation with precepting

Assessment:
Delegation is an essential nursing and leadership skill. Delegation can increase your productive time and help to motivate others. Delegation occurs all of the time: Your manager delegated you as a preceptor. You delegate to your preceptee and you may also delegate to other assistive staff; but delegation should never be simply a way to shed excessive work during a busy period.

Delegation needs to be learned, practiced and intentional. Model the “Five Rights of Delegation” and know what can you delegate.

Recommendations:  
2) Model effective delegation for your preceptees (i.e. using the Five Rights with your Care Partners).
3) Discuss the importance of delegation with your preceptee and then explain the “Five Rights.”
4) Take time to practice delegation.