Positive Precepting Strategies

Use these tips to precept experienced nurses. Most are good strategies to use with all nurses new to your unit.

- Be generous in providing positive feedback and encouragement.
- Be honest when providing constructive feedback.
- Make a concerted effort to meet with your preceptee on a weekly basis to discuss his achievements and learning needs and to update his orientation checklists.
- Ask the experienced preceptee to self-evaluate his performance. He will probably be more critical of himself than you, the preceptor, would be.

Steer Clear of these Pitfalls

Try to avoid these actions when precepting:

- Overwhelm the new nurse with too many details and minutiae, believing that she can handle all this information at once. After all, “she has 20 years of experience.”
- Take over in situations when the experienced preceptee is capable of managing it herself.
- Assign responsibilities that are beyond the preceptee’s ability to successfully complete.
- Assume that new, experienced nurses require little or no support, supervision or instruction.
- Avoid giving your preceptee constructive feedback because she has experience, and you don’t want to offend her.

Experienced Nurses: New Challenges, Opportunities

Alspach reports that “orientation is the means by which new staff are introduced to the philosophy, goals, policies, procedures, position expectations, physical facilities and services of a particular work setting.” This statement is true for both new graduates and experienced nurses. The primary goal of their orientation is to become an effective, capable staff member. However, their orientation requirements will most likely not be the same, and they may have different needs and objectives. The competence level of an experienced nurse may be assessed more readily during her orientation phase, and socialization may take place earlier, as well. When precepting an experienced nurse, keep the following suggestions in mind.

- Be aware that experienced nurses usually have had more experiential learning opportunities, and they are more able to use their critical thinking skills without assistance.
- Experienced nurses are more likely to identify their own learning needs and tend to “know what they don’t know.” Encourage your experienced preceptee to be active in planning her orientation.
- Find out exactly what your preceptee’s past experience has been. Has she been working in an adult ICU but is now working in the ER of a children’s hospital?
- Verbally recognize the experienced preceptee’s skill level and knowledge. Ask her to share her expertise with you.
- Listen openly and actively if your preceptee has suggestions that may help your unit run more efficiently. Yes, it’s hard to repeatedly hear, “We didn’t do it this way where I used to work.” But, who knows, some of these ideas may be quite valuable!
- Show respect for the new preceptee’s beliefs and values, unless they are in direct conflict with those of your organization.
- Consider offering your experienced nurse more off-the-unit experiences. She probably does not need to focus solely on her assigned unit during her orientation. Encourage your preceptee to spend a day in the GI lab or the PACU so she has a better idea of how your facility functions on an organizational level. Plus, it gives her the opportunity to meet new people.