

Guidelines to Precept Graduate Nurses

Prepare

Know the graduate's learning needs and experiences when planning goals.

Right Experience

What experience is necessary to meet the goals chosen?

Energize

Demonstrate your enthusiasm and share your knowledge.

Communication

Be open, honest and respectful.

Experience

Keep safety as the first priority. Intervene when necessary, but allow the graduate to learn from experience.

Progress

Evaluate the graduate's achievement of the goals and objectives.

Talk Out Loud

Have the graduate talk out loud when making clinical decisions.

References:

Murphy, B. (2008). Positive precepting: preparation can reduce the stress. *MEDSURG Nursing*, 26 (3), 183

Help Graduate Nurses Move from Theory to Practice

One of the greatest challenges for graduate nurses is moving from the academic background of depending on textbook knowledge (nursing theory) to a real-life setting where nurses must use that knowledge to provide care for patients (nursing practice).

Preceptors who take the time at the beginning of each shift to discuss the tentative plan for the shift and the priorities for patient care with the graduate nurses are facilitating the nurses' growth from theory to practice. By thinking out loud when planning the day and outlining priorities, the preceptors allow the graduates to begin the process of critical thinking. Graduate nurses also can think out loud as they use the nursing process to plan, prioritize and complete nursing interventions. The graduate nurses need the opportunity to show that they can fill in critical gaps or ask questions about clinical decisions when discussing anticipated care.

Using concept maps facilitates this type of discussion and encourages the use of the "what if" and "how will we" questions. (See the August 2009 [Preceptor News](#) for more information.)

Because graduate nurses are still learning how to move from theory to practice, they will have opportunities to make errors in judgment. When graduates think out loud, the preceptors can decide to intercede or to allow the graduates to learn from nonharmful mistakes. The preceptors must decide if the graduates' plans are just different from what the preceptors would have chosen or if their plans are ineffective or unsafe.

The preceptors may choose to let the graduates make a mistake as long as there are no safety concerns. For instance, the graduates may make a plan for the patient's daily care but forget that the patient will be off the unit all morning. Graduate nurses may plan to start an IV without gathering all of the needed supplies before going into the patient's room. Although some mistakes may result in confusion and additional planning, allowing the graduates to make these errors encourages them to become self-reliant. By encouraging the new graduates to be self-directed, the preceptors also encourage the development of clinical decision-making skills.

As experienced nurses, preceptors can encourage the graduate nurses to apply conceptual knowledge to clinical practice and to begin moving beyond being novice nurses. Preceptors have the opportunity to make valuable contributions toward the ability of graduate nurses to bridge the gap between theory and practice.