

Adjusting Preceptor Focus

Just like patients, not all preceptees are the same. Assessing your preceptees is a critical stage in identifying their learning needs. Because these learning needs vary, it may be necessary to change the focus of your preceptor teaching plan. One of the most important variables is the type of orientee you are precepting. This three-part newsletter series will review the specific needs of the following types of preceptee.

- new graduate nurse
- experienced nurse
- student nurse

Themes

There are three major themes for precepting experienced nurses.

- learning needs
- assessment of competency and critical thinking
- socialization

References

Flynn, J.P. and Stack, M.C. (2006). The role of the preceptor: A guide for nurse educators, clinicians, and managers. 2e. Springer, New York.

Jackson, M., Ignatavicius, D., and Case, B. (2006). Conversations in Critical Thinking and Clinical Judgement. Jones and Bartlett, Sudbury.

Needs Of Student Nurses

part three of a special three-part series

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is important in all stages of a nurse's growth and development. Novice nurses, particularly student nurses, need to be encouraged to think critically. One way preceptors can help student nurses hone their critical thinking abilities is to ask them a lot of questions. There are several types of questioning that can be used by a preceptor. The first type of questioning involves anticipatory guidance, which is similar to rehearsing before a situation or intervention. This allows the preceptor to simultaneously assess the student's learning needs. The second type is questioning concurrently, in which the preceptor asks questions during clinical procedures or activities when appropriate. Lastly, follow-up questions after a procedure or situation can help clarify and will aid in critical analysis. Follow-up questions can reaffirm or redirect decisions and priorities, and they also help to formulate future performance. Feedback is essential following each stage of questioning.

Assessment of Competency and Skill Acquisition

Students often measure their success in clinical rotations by their opportunities to perform certain skills. They feel accomplished when they are able to practice the skills they have learned in the skills lab in a clinical setting. It may be challenging as a preceptor to hand over the responsibilities for nursing tasks to students, but it is the best gift you can give to students. Preceptors must assess the readiness of their students by asking questions that allow them to process the significance of the tasks. Students should be able to relate the scientific evidence, appropriateness, implications and potential complications of each task. Preceptors work closely with nursing faculty to understand their role expectations as preceptor and the course objectives, as well as the expectations of students' performance. Preceptors should be prepared to relate relevant information and specific examples of competency and skill acquisition to faculty. Preceptors should watch for signs of incompetency and other "red flags." Faculty should be consulted when students exhibit unprofessional behavior; are abnormally hesitant, anxious, or defensive; or have continued difficulties with drug calculations, basic assessment, prioritization and patient safety issues. Preceptors should take corrective measures, as needed, and intervene with the students. If behaviors do not improve, then faculty should be consulted.

Socialization

The focus of socialization of a student nurse is the role modeling of professionalism. Students need to see professionalism in action in the workplace. If we want to keep young nurses in nursing, we need to make an effort to increase the visibility of our professional values and standards. Preceptors can role model professionalism, and they can involve student nurses in discussions on professional values and how these values can be incorporated into patient care. When developing a relationship with student nurses, preceptors should discuss desired behaviors on professionalism, values and other areas of competency.