

Preceptors Can Role Model Self-Evaluation

According to the American Nurses Association's standards of professional performance, nurses should engage in performance appraisal to evaluate their nursing practice in relation to professional practice standards. Nurse preceptors can role model evaluation as a professional standard by seeking constructive feedback, taking action to achieve goals and participating in peer reviews. They can role model this behavior by asking these questions on a regular basis.

- How has the day gone in general?
- Have I completed everything I should have?
- Have I considered my learning needs?
- Have I been organized and able to set priorities? If not, why?
- How much time am I spending performing independent nursing interventions?
- How much time am I spending performing collaborative nursing interventions?
- Could I be doing more? Am I trying to do too much?
- Am I identifying and using resources appropriately?
- Am I acting in a collegial way?
- Have I been clear and specific when delegating actions and communicating with others?
- Am I including patients and families as partners in care?
- How would my patients evaluate me in relation to meeting their specific needs?
- What changes should I make tomorrow?

A New Perspective On Evaluation

Dictionary.com defines evaluation as “an act or instance of evaluating or appraising.” Another definition of evaluation that is used in health care is “a diagnosis or diagnostic study of a physical or mental condition.” For preceptors, how one defines evaluation doesn't change their views on this concept because they often describe evaluations as one of their most difficult roles. Perhaps these nurses did not have good role models in the past, or the role of evaluator is not clearly understood. It may be helpful to view evaluation in different terms from the academic role of evaluating knowledge through “exams.” Instead, preceptors should view the evaluation process as a professional gift that they give orientees to assist them in their transformation into a professional nurse. The evaluation is not only a gift; it also is a professional standard and responsibility.

During orientation, the ultimate goal for preceptors is to teach the nurse orientees the value of performance appraisal as a professional tool to improve the overall quality of health care for patients. The approach that preceptors choose for their roles as evaluator can have a strong impact on helping orientees to eventually appraise their own practice and think critically about their nursing role. Evaluating with a judgmental style may impede critical thinking. If orientees feel like they are being judged, they will spend more time worrying about what the preceptor thinks of them and less time on what they should be thinking or doing. (Alfaro-LeFevre, 2004).

Preceptors should use the evaluation process as an opportunity to appraise performance from a process improvement perspective, where evaluation affects and improves critical thinking. Not only are strengths identified to assess competency, but areas of weakness are acknowledged as opportunities for further learning. Preceptors can implement standards of professional performance appraisal by reminding orientees that evaluation is a professional obligation. New and experienced nurses benefit from on-going performance appraisal.

References:

- Alfaro-LeFevre, R. (2006). Applying nursing process: A tool for critical thinking. Lippincott:Philadelphia.
Alfaro-LeFevre, R. (2004). Critical thinking and clinical judgment: A practical approach. Saunders:St. Louis.
Dictionary.com

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