

## Adjusting Preceptor Focus

Just like patients, not all preceptees are the same. The assessment of 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

The major themes for precepting new graduate nurses follow.

- learning needs
- socialization
- critical thinking

## 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.

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## Needs Of New Graduate Nurses

*part one of a special three-part series*

### Learning Needs

Preceptors must be able to thoroughly assess the learning needs of preceptees to provide an individualized orientation and to ensure the preceptees can meet the goals of the position. An assessment of learning needs should include collecting information on the new graduates' educational background and clinical experiences, plus any related work experiences. Preceptors can ask new graduates to complete a self-assessment of their background, their skills, strengths and improvement areas. When assessing learning needs, preceptors should discuss the preceptees' concerns or fears. This facilitates the learning needs of the preceptees and supports the acquisition of the needed skills, behaviors and attitudes necessary for their new role as nurses. Follow up these initial assessments with periodic and ongoing assessments of the new graduates' abilities. Further assessment may prompt revisions of the teaching plan to reflect changing needs. Preceptors may want to review content on adult learning principles and learning styles to individualize both teaching and learning.

### Socialization

The goal of preceptors is to ease or lessen the effects of reality shock that are often experienced by new graduate nurses as they transition into the "real world" role of nursing. Signs of reality shock include negativity, fatigue, anger and anxiety. Preceptors should anticipate these signs and recognize their significance and potential to create obstacles in the learning process. And, more important, preceptors should employ techniques they have learned from their own experiences that will help remove those obstacles. These techniques may include helping new graduate nurses to sharpen their organizational, prioritization and delegation skills, which often are under developed and can lead to great anxiety and frustration. By intervening early, preceptors can decrease reality shock as they socialize new nurses to their new roles. Lastly, maintaining a positive attitude can go a long way in developing a trusting and sincere relationship between preceptors and preceptees, which is a vital component for socializing new graduate nurses into the work setting. Preceptors are the essential link to ensure that preceptees are adequately socialized to the role of new nurses.

### Critical Thinking

One way that preceptors help preceptees think through clinical problems is by engaging in dialogues meant to help new graduate nurses think deeply about various situations. Preceptors should ask clinical questions and initiate discussions with the new graduates. New graduate nurses should be taught how to question information, make connections between learning, reflect on and analyze their learning, and think out loud by discussing these perspectives of care with their preceptors. This will allow new graduates to make the link between thinking and the nursing actions and interventions that form their new nursing practice.