Needs Of Experienced Nurses
part two of a special three-part series

Learning Needs
An assessment of learning needs begins with an assessment of what the nurses know and how they know it. The preceptor asks the experienced nurse orientees about their previous work-related experience, including the motivations, goals and desired learning outcomes for their new nursing role. A higher level of learning, referred to as transformational learning, can be achieved when the preceptor and orientees work together to identify learning needs and to set individualized educational goals based on what the nurses already know and what they need to know to be successful in the new setting. Newly hired nurse orientees with experience in another nursing setting can be of great value to a nursing unit, and their previous work experiences should be compared to the role functions in the new setting. In addition, acknowledge the orientees’ potential contributions to the nursing care in their new setting.

Assessment of Competency and Critical Thinking
Assessment of competency is a major focus of preceptors because they help to ensure that the new nurses will be competent, capable employees and valued team members. Often, nurses working in the same setting for a length of time become skill-oriented or task-oriented, which can affect their critical-thinking skills. Therefore, an assessment of competency includes an assessment of problem-solving and critical-thinking abilities. An experienced nurse thinks differently than an inexperienced nurse. Many can function at a higher level because of their nursing experience and knowledge transference, which contribute to an increased ability to reason and solve problems. Because of this, preceptors may need to adjust their assessment of critical thinking from the assessments used for nursing students or new graduate nurses. The experienced nurse has likely developed advanced critical-thinking skills and may have developed alternate approaches to some basic nursing skills and tasks. The preceptor must still ensure that standards of care, policies and procedures are well-understood and followed. Specific things preceptors should assess include the ability to perform a comprehensive physical exam and note changes in patient conditions, ability to adequately interpret assessment data and ability to implement nursing interventions according to standards of care, while demonstrating accountability for safe, effective, legal and ethical practice. In addition, review the work of Patricia Benner, R.N., Ph.D., on novice to expert as it relates to the assessment of competency. It will help preceptors to understand that nurses in new settings will once again be novices as they help the experienced nurse orientees to grow and develop in their new roles.

Socialization
The socialization of an experienced nurse to a new nursing setting is particularly important. The preceptor will spend more time socializing the orientees to the functions of the new setting, people and the organization and less time socializing the experienced nurse to the role of the professional nurse. The preceptor should begin to bridge connections for orientees so they can acclimate to the new unit quickly. Preceptors rely on what they know about personality types to assist the socialization process in the most comfortable manner for orientees.

Themes
There are three major themes for precepting experienced nurses.

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

References