

Thriving Together: How Generation Z is Transforming Nursing Education

Cristin Coleman, MSN, RN CCRN



Introduction

Working with Generation Z nurses has been both innovative and transformative. Defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z brings a unique perspective to nursing, shaped by their experiences, educational background, and the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As an educator, adapting to this generation's needs requires a deep understanding of their characteristics and a commitment to ensure nursing orientation and education has been designed for their success.

The Challenges of Generation Z Nurses

Generation Z has encountered a variety of challenges during their nursing education and early careers. The pandemic disrupted traditional BSN and ADN programs, shifting didactic lectures online and replacing in-person clinical experiences with virtual simulations. Consequently, many new nurses have entered the workforce with

limited hands-on experience and reduced confidence in applying clinical skills, adding strain to their transition into professional roles.

Additionally, Generation Z nurses bring distinct values and expectations to the profession, further reshaping traditional nursing environments. They prioritize transparency, purpose, work-life balance, and respect in the workplace. These priorities differ from previous generations of nurses often ingrained in the "sink-or-swim" culture, where new nurses learned through trial and error, often sacrificing personal time. It is important to understand, identify and address these generational differences to ensure the success of Generation Z nurses and aligning nursing education with their values.

A New Approach to Nursing Orientation and Education

The traditional orientation model—relying solely on clinical bedside experiences within a fixed timeline—was insufficient

to meet the evolving needs of Generation Z nurses. Recognizing these limitations, a new nursing orientation and education model was developed to address diverse learning requirements and bridge gaps in knowledge. This innovative approach emphasizes targeted and flexible learning strategies that incorporate various educational platforms, foster mutual respect between preceptors and orientees, and promote collaboration with interdisciplinary staff, such as attending physicians and APPs. Continuous learning was instilled as a core principle, and new nurses were encouraged to take accountability for their educational journey. Communication and feedback were redefined as tools for growth, fostering a positive and supportive learning environment that empowered nurses to thrive.

Key Initiatives in Nursing Orientation and Education

A series of targeted initiatives was implemented to address the diverse needs of Generation Z nurses while supporting their development into confident and competent professionals:

Individualized Orientation for Orientees

- Orientation plans were tailored to each new nurse's background and needs. Clinical nurse educator and orientees identified essential learning experiences together, such as targeted patient assignments, to align with developmental goals.
- Flexible orientation timelines ensured competency, while frequent check-ins with orientees and clinical educators provided timely feedback and course corrections.
- Unit leadership and clinical nurse ed-

ucator conducted regular 1:1 meetings with orientees to foster trust, address personal and professional well-being, and ensure alignment with learning objectives.

- Preceptor Education and Support
 - Preceptors received training on effective teaching and coaching. Building strong relationships with preceptors fostered confidence, open communication, and collaboration.
- Regular check-ins with preceptors and clinical educators allowed for real-time feedback and timely resolution of challenges.
- Interdisciplinary staff, including ICU attending physicians and advanced practice providers, provided additional clinical learning support in collaboration with clinical nurse educator.
- Versatile Learning Environments
 - Hands-on skill focused training covered education and training on skills such as central line dressing changes, intraosseous (IO) placements, medication preparation, and blood administration, building technical proficiency and confidence outside of the clinical environment.
- Simulations bridged theory and practice by focusing on critical thinking and clinical scenarios such as arrhythmia identification, defibrillator use, and rapid patient assessment. These safe, controlled environments allowed nurses to refine technical skills and enhance their ability to respond effectively in high-pressure situations.
- Didactic lectures complemented practical training, offering foundational knowledge and opportunities for case reviews and discussions. Bedside experiences with preceptors provided structured environments for skill application and confidence-building.

Interactive and Peer-Centered Learning Activities

- Activities such as escape rooms, trivia, and "seek and find" scenarios encouraged teamwork and open dialogue in a low-stress environment.
- Regular quizzes and peer-centered learn-

ing sessions addressed knowledge gaps while promoting problem-solving and collaboration.

- These activities also reinforced clinical reasoning skills, allowing nurses to engage with content in dynamic and memorable ways.

Technology-Driven Education

- A hybrid, technology-based platform catered to Generation Z's comfort with technology, allowing learners to progress at their own pace and revisit content as needed.
- This flexibility reinforced critical concepts and supported ongoing learning.
- Judgment-Free Learning Environment
 - Feedback was delivered constructively, focusing on growth and improvement. Real-time feedback, structured debriefs, and reflective practices promoted meaningful learning.
- Clinical educators and preceptors approached learning needs with empathy, collaborating to identify challenges and provide actionable, supportive suggestions. This approach not only ensured that nurses felt encouraged and valued but also created a nurturing environment conducive to professional growth.

The Impact of Change: Reduced Turnover and Increased Success

The introduction of tailored orientation and education strategies has transformed nursing education. By emphasizing individualized support and flexible learning pathways, the program has delivered significant improvements. Within two years of implementing the new orientation and education model, nurse turnover within the first 12 months post-orientation decreased from 70% to just 12.5%. This remarkable improvement highlights the importance of a supportive, adaptable learning environment that empowers nurses to succeed.

Conclusion

Generation Z has introduced new perspectives to nursing, emphasizing collaboration, support, and continuous learning.

By tailoring orientation and education models to their unique needs, nurse educators have created environments where these nurses thrive. The success of these initiatives underscores the importance of evolving nursing education to address the demands of a dynamic and ever-changing workforce. Together, these efforts ensure that the future of nursing remains vibrant, capable, and innovative. ■

References:

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An orange rectangular advertisement for Neosho County Community College. At the top is a logo with the letters 'NC' in a stylized font. Below the logo, the text 'NEOSHO COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE' is written in a serif font. In the center, a list of career paths is displayed in bold, sans-serif font: 'Earn a degree or certification in: Nursing • CNA • CMA CPR • Sonography Dietary Manager Healthcare Coding EMT • HIT • OTA Medical Assistant Phlebotomy Surgical Technology'. At the bottom, the words 'APPLY TODAY!' are written in large, bold, black, sans-serif font. Below this, the college's website and contact information are listed: 'neosho.edu • (620) 431-2820 800 W 14th St, Chanute, KS'.