

Mentorship of Novice Nursing Professional Development Specialists

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This article is the final segment of a three-part series focusing on mentorship of novice nurse educators. Dr. Sue Straszynski, a seasoned Nursing Professional Development (NPD) Specialist, shares her insights via questions and responses, recorded as follows:

DR: Please tell us how long you have been an NPD Specialist and your specialty.

SS: I have been an NPD specialist for 11 years. My specialty is maternal-child health and, more recently, simulation.

DR: Were you formally prepared for your role as an NPD Specialist? If so, please describe. If not, how did you navigate your early days as an NPD Specialist?

SS: I would say no. I was often a preceptor for new hires and worked with students. I was often a lead person on project implementation and assisted previous educators with educational programs and events. I had team members to help me acclimate to the role. My challenge was that I had no one in my specific specialty. I had often felt that I was on my own. It was necessary to tweak things to make them specific to my specialty.

DR: In retrospect, is there any part of your preparation that you would have done differently?

SS: I didn't take advantage of the resources on the Association for Nurses in Professional Development (ANPD) website. I regret that. I think that having a specific person or mentor that I could go to would have been very nice.

DR: NPD specialists must successfully navigate mentoring, coaching, teaching, and providing constructive feedback to novice NPD specialists. Please describe how you handle these aspects of your role.

SS: The first thing I like to do is get to know them and understand their role. I usually discuss with them what they would like to do and what they are required to do. Being a novice NPD Specialist can be overwhelming in the beginning. Sometimes, people enter the role with their ideas, but they may be too grandiose. They will need to trim them down and prioritize. Priorities come from assessing learning needs for the system, the department, and the staff nurses/managers on the unit. The staff nurses are the end users; therefore, hearing from them provides valuable insights.

DR: What professional development activities have you become involved in to help improve your effectiveness as a mentor for new NPD specialists?

SS: I have done a lot of courses and seminars related to the role of the educator and learning styles through ANPD and other resources.

DR: What advice would you give to a novice NPD specialist?

SS: You will always face challenges and issues; do not take them personally. You won't be able to please everyone. It can be frustrating when you put a lot of work into planning an educational activity, and it may seem that appreciation for its purpose is not understood. One goal of mandatory education is to teach initiatives that enable the nursing staff to provide our patients with the best possible care. I work in the maternal child health area, and our nurses are educated on the regulations set by the New Jersey Department of Health and the New Jersey Perinatal Collaborative. Two pieces of advice: Join ANPD and utilize their resources, and obtain a mentor, which is critical for success as an NPD specialist. For those working in specialized areas, I also recommend joining organizations related to your specialty. I belong to the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses. ■



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