



Shaping Our Future Through the Art of Precepting

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One of the most rewarding experiences of my career was serving as a preceptor. I view orienting new graduates as both a professional responsibility and an art—one that quietly shapes the future of nursing practice. As experienced nurses guide new graduates through the transition from student to professional, they do far more than teach tasks or policies. They transmit clinical judgment, professional values, resilience, and a professional identity. In an era marked by workforce shortages, increasing patient acuity, and high early-career turnover, effective precepting is one of the most critical strategies for sustaining the nursing profession.

Precepting as a Foundation for Professional Practice

The transition from nursing education to independent clinical practice is among the most vulnerable periods in a nurse's career. New graduates are expected to integrate complex knowledge, develop sound clinical judgment, manage competing priorities, and function confidently within interprofessional teams, often in a hectic environment. Without structured support, this transition can lead to stress, self-doubt, and attrition.

Research demonstrates that effective preceptorship significantly improves confidence, competence, and readiness for practice. In a systematic review, Irwin et al. (2018) found that newly qualified nurses who participated in structured preceptorship reported greater confidence and improved professional development during their transition to practice. These findings reinforce the essential role preceptors play in bridging the gap between education and real-world clinical demands.

The Necessity of Quality Precepting Programs

Precepting should not rely solely on individual goodwill or informal processes. High-quality precepting programs are intentional, structured, and supported by leadership. They define expectations, establish consistent goals, and ensure preceptors have the time and resources needed to teach effectively.

Evidence supports the organizational value of these programs. An umbrella review by Berthelsen et al. (2024) found that introduction programs incorporating formal preceptorship were associated with increased nurse retention and reduced turnover. Given the financial and operational costs of nurse turnover, investing in structured precepting programs is both a workforce strategy and a patient-safety imperative.

Preceptor Development: Preparing Nurses to Teach

Clinical expertise alone does not ensure effective teaching. Preceptor development is essential to equip experienced nurses with skills in adult learning, communication, coaching, and feedback. Without preparation, even highly skilled clinicians may struggle to support learners effectively.

Hong and Yoon (2021) demonstrated that nurses who completed formal preceptor training exhibited significantly stronger clinical teaching behaviors than those without training. Their findings highlight the importance of preparing preceptors not only as clinicians, but as educators and leaders. Preceptor education also helps mitigate burnout by providing strategies for managing teaching responsibilities alongside patient care. This is particularly important and early career nurses are often being called on to serve as preceptors before they feel they are ready. Several new graduates have shared this with us on our Special Interest Group calls.

The Influence of Preceptors on Work Environment Culture

Preceptors are culture carriers. They model professionalism, communication, teamwork, and ethical practice. For new graduates, the preceptor often shapes their perception of the unit, the organization, and even the profession. Supportive precepting fosters psychological safety, encouraging questions, reflection, and growth. Conversely, poor precepting experiences can contribute to disengagement and early departure from nursing.

Longevity at the Bedside Matters

Experienced clinical nurses are invaluable assets. Their clinical judgment, institutional knowledge, and mentorship stabilize care environments. Precepting provides a meaningful pathway for experienced nurses to extend their impact while remaining at the bedside. When organizations support seasoned nurses as preceptors, they reinforce the value of experience and professional growth across the career span.

Investing in the Future

Personalized precepting, grounded in caring is not merely an orientation strategy—it is a professional commitment to nursing's future and an ethical obligation. High-quality precepting programs and preceptor development strengthen practice environments, support workforce stability, and safeguard patient care. By investing in preceptors, we invest in nurses—and in the sustainability of the profession itself. ■

References online:
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