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Stop Making Students Pay for Clinical Education: Florida's Ethical Crisis

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Florida nurse practitioner students face an unethical practice that threatens our profession's integrity: paying thousands of dollars for their own clinical preceptors. As NP programs proliferate across our state and the preceptor shortage intensifies, this commercialization of clinical education has become increasingly normalized. It's time for Florida's nursing community to recognize this practice for what it is; an ethical failure that compromises educational quality, perpetuates inequity, and potentially endangers patient safety.

The Problem

Students sometimes pay \$1,500 to \$5,000 per clinical rotation, sometimes over \$10,000 for an entire program, to secure required preceptors. Programs justify this by citing the preceptor shortage, but calling a practice "necessary" doesn't make it ethical. When students pay their own evaluators, we've fundamentally corrupted professional education.

Why This Matters

Educational Integrity: Clinical education is not optional. It is the foundation of safe practice. When institutions allow students to purchase preceptors, they abdicate their core responsibility for educational quality. Programs can no longer ensure consistent standards, appropriate learning experiences,

or meaningful oversight.

Conflicts of Interest: Preceptors who receive direct payment from students face inherent conflicts when evaluating those students. Will a preceptor who depends on student fees honestly assess unsafe practice? Will they identify a student who lacks clinical competence? Financial relationships compromise the objective evaluation our profession demands.

Equity and Access: Requiring students to pay thousands in undisclosed fees creates barriers for economically disadvantaged students and those from underserved communities, the populations that nursing seeks to recruit. We cannot simultaneously advocate for workforce diversity and maintain practices that exclude students based on their ability to pay.

Professional Standards: Nursing has traditionally viewed clinical teaching as professional obligation and service to the profession. Commercializing preceptorships contradicts this value and degrades our professional culture.

A Call to Action

Every Florida nurse practitioner who benefited from quality clinical education, provided by preceptors who mentored us without charging fees, has a stake in this issue. We must advocate for the following:

- Clear position statements from professional organizations opposing student-paid preceptorships
- Transparency requirements so prospective students understand true program costs
- Investment in sustainable preceptor development and support systems
- Commitment from organizations and our own practices to serve as preceptors without charging students

The preceptor shortage demands urgent action and ethical action. Allowing students to pay for required clinical education sets a dangerous precedent that normalizes commercialization of professional preparation.

Florida's nursing community must reject this practice and commit to solutions that preserve educational integrity, ensure equity, and uphold the professional values that define nursing. Our students, our profession, and our patients deserve nothing less. ■

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