

The Lasting Impact of Nurse Preceptors: Helping Residents Today, So They Can Help Patients Tomorrow

A Celebratory Tribute to Nursing's Preceptors from Nurse Residents' Perspectives

Contributing Authors: Todd Johnson, BSN, RN; Morgan King, BSN, RN; Ruva Ndlovu, BSN, RN; Riley Stopp, BSN, RN; Lily Wojcik, BSN, RN; Emma Esteves, BSN, RN

The transition from nursing student to a professional registered nurse in today's fast-paced, complex healthcare environment is both exciting and profoundly overwhelming. Newly licensed registered nurses (NLRNs) enter practice with a strong foundation of nursing theory. Upon introduction to the practical field of nursing, however, many NLRNs quickly realize their nursing school experience may only be semi-comparable to the reality of patient-centered care. Duchscher (2009) describes this shift as "transition shock," defined as the "physical, emotional, intellectual, and sociocultural stress new graduate nurses face when moving from the role of student to registered nurse." The approach to developing NLRN's acknowledges this phenomenon and tasks experienced nurses with guiding NLRN's to ease the challenges of this new role.

During entry to practice, when NLRN's are at their most vulnerable, preceptors play a crucial role in shaping their transition into practice. They guide new nurses through unfamiliar clinical environments, help mitigate uncertainty, and provide reassurance as residents build confidence in their skills and establish their own professional identities as registered nurses (Urban & Barnes, 2020). For countless NLRNs, preceptors serve as guiding lights—modeling what safe, compassionate, and competent nursing practice looks like every single shift in real time.

Preceptors as Vital Lifelines Who Provide a Safe Space for Learning

The Association of Nursing Professional Development (ANPD) defines a preceptor as "an individual with demonstrated competence in a

specific area who guides, assesses, and validates the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to transition to a new role, specialty, or environment in the healthcare setting" (Harper et al., 2023, p. 3).

For NLRNs, preceptors are more than instructors—they are the indispensable lifelines who bridge theory to practice while providing psychological safety during a period of intense self-doubt and discouragement. Confidence is learned through practice, but NLRN's will not make it far alone. Preceptors are the shepherds, who selflessly guide NLRNs through a whole new world, asking for nothing in return as they watch them bloom.

Supportive preceptors foster environments where residents feel comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification without fear of judgment. This is essential, as many NLRNs hesitate to speak up due to concerns about appearing unprepared or incompetent (Hampton et al., 2021). When questions go unasked, patient safety may be compromised and feelings of inadequacy can intensify, contributing to burnout and attrition. In contrast, preceptors who encourage curiosity and provide constructive feedback promote confidence, critical thinking, and a sense of belonging for NLRNs.

As patient acuity and complexity increases, NLRNs may experience heightened stress and uncertainty regarding their roles (Urban & Barnes, 2020). Effective preceptors resist the urge to provide all the answers; instead, they guide residents through clinical reasoning, empowering them to make informed decisions. This approach builds competence, autonomy, and trust in one's

clinical judgment—essential components of professional growth.

We have discovered throughout our residency program that preceptors also play a key role in socializing residents into unit culture, which includes shared values, communication styles, and unwritten norms. Understanding these dynamics can be challenging for NLRNs trying to "fit in" while still developing confidence. By creating safe spaces for learning and professional growth, preceptors help residents navigate unit culture, reduce transition shock, and recognize their role as members of the healthcare team (Harper et al., 2023).

Resident Reflections: The Lasting Impact of Preceptorship

The authors, as NLRNs in a nursing residency program, are deeply grateful for the competence, patience, and compassion demonstrated by our own preceptors. Their leadership and dedication to patient care have left everlasting impressions on our professional journeys.

Many of us entered residency feeling overwhelmed and scared, and many of those feelings remain as we pass our six-month or half-way mark in the program. Yet, our preceptors remain there, to acknowledge the fear and uncertainty, reminding us that growth comes with time, persistence, and patience. Among our personal reflections, we recognized our shared gratitude for our preceptors. In one account, a moment of hesitation by the resident at the bedside of a patient, was met without criticism or judgment, but with reassurance and support in which the preceptor stated softly to the resident—"One day this will be you."

Those words became a source of strength, reminding us that confidence is built through experience, not perfection.

Challenging NLRN's with intention is effective as the best preceptors asked questions, prompted clinical reasoning, and encouraged leadership in patient care. Though demanding at times, these moments fostered critical thinking and revealed a not yet discovered potential. Paired with encouragement and constructive feedback, these challenges served as powerful tools for our growth.

Others described the profound impact of preceptors who modeled compassion and patient advocacy. The simplest of actions—pulling up a chair to listen, validating a patient's fears, and demonstrating respectful collaboration with the healthcare team—revealed how nursing extends as both a science

and an art, one focused on human presence, connection, and belonging.

Across all our experiences, one theme consistently emerged: preceptors made us feel seen, supported, and capable. They helped us find our voices, trust our instincts, and believe that we belong in this profession.

Celebrating Preceptors: Shaping the Future of Nursing One Resident at a Time

Our lived experience transitioning into practice, coupled with the instruction of our preceptors, has defined our success during our nursing residency. We feel deeply fortunate to be learning from those preceptors that go above and beyond. Although the transition period for residents can be marked by stress and uncertainty, these key preceptors make a difference by fostering growth, resiliency,

and confidence as we begin to develop our own professional identities. By demonstrating professionalism, compassion, and clinical excellence each day, preceptors show us what it truly means to be a nurse. While they may not recognize it in the moment, their early support is key to our success.

To every nurse who has served as a preceptor, or will do so in the future, we celebrate you today and always. ■

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Why Nurses Belong in Civic Leadership

Contributing Author: Carol Roe, JD, MSN, RN

Recently I attended a seminar on the topic of Nurses Running for Office. One of the speakers described the experience of campaigning as “exhilarating.” I was reminded of my own experiences as a candidate for Cleveland Heights City Council.

While I had worked on campaigns most of my adult life, I had never planned to run myself. A significant barrier for me personally was the known financial cost. I was approached by my neighbors and others in the community, including nurses who felt, like me, that my neighborhood was not being fully represented on our City Council. Having encouraged other nurses to run for years, I could not decline the call. The suggestion became more palatable once colleagues offered to raise money and a volunteer stepped forward to be Campaign Treasurer.

A few of my nurse colleagues questioned why I would want to put myself through such an undignified course of action. After all, politics is “so dirty.” Perhaps this

sentiment helps explain the disappointing historically low numbers of nurses in public office. The majority of my nurse colleagues shared my vision about the role of nurses in civic engagement and politics and were some of the most enthusiastic supporters of my campaigns. That vision is shaped in part since we chose to be nurses because we want to help others. We advocate for patients in the clinical setting and have been called to extend that advocacy to influence health policy.

That shared vision is also shaped by the profession's Code of Ethics (2025). Provision 9.2 of the American Nurses Association's *Code of Ethics for Nurses* states “Individual civic engagement and nursing's civic professionalism embody nursing's covenant and affirm the mutual expectations and responsibilities between nursing and society.” (ANA, 2025, p. 8) Provision 9.5 states “nurses have a role at every level of the democratic process. This includes informed voting in local and national elections; running for office;

combating voter suppression; and working closely with local, state, and federal elected officials to develop, promote, and facilitate the passage of health and social policy change.” (ANA, 2025, p. 41). Thus, nurses are expected to be leaders in the community.

Campaigning for office is not an easy process but it offers the exciting opportunities and challenges of learning about new issues and complex topics. In Cleveland Heights, for example, the city was under a consent agreement at the time with the United States Environmental Protection Agency due to the inadequate, outdated sewer system. To be an informed decision maker I had to learn the intricacies to bring the sewer system up to date.

Economic development was similarly an eye-opening experience. Cleveland Heights, like many other cities, had a shopping center that was state of the art when it was built in the 1970's. Over the years shoppers' preferences changed, leaving the location predominately vacant. I needed to understand the complexities of zoning regulations, eminent domain, construction issues, landlord-tenant relations as well community sentiments to respond to voters' questions.

One of the somewhat surprising aspects