

Recognizing the Role of The Nurse Preceptor

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RECOGNIZING THE ROLE OF THE NURSING PRECEPTOR

Purpose-This literature review explored what new and additional modes of recognition Registered Nurse (RN) preceptors at PeaceHealth St. Joseph's Medical Center (PHSJMC) would find the most rewarding.

Rationale-RN preceptors are key for the development of future and current RNs, however retention and "burnout" are common among current preceptors. Hospitals and academic institutions rely on nurse preceptors to fully prepare new nurses to be safe and competent in the field. It is essential to reward this valid and important recognition among nurses to ensure success with preceptor reward programs.

Methods-This literature review included two sources that were both descriptive and qualitative, one qualitative, one quantitative study and two literature reviews. It was determined what preceptor programs and recognition were most beneficial. An on-line survey was conducted with current preceptors at PHSJMC to further explore what may enhance their current recognition program.

Results-There are several different programs found to be successful at multiple facilities. An overall theme that emerged is that preceptors need to feel valued for participating in preceptor programs. Current facilities recognize their nurse preceptors by providing monetary compensation, special name tags, education compensation, and/or food. At PHSJMC preceptors receive an additional \$1.25/hr. Many event style recognition activities have been offered with limited success. An on-line survey was conducted among current preceptors at PHSJMC to determine what new incentives they would value as recognition. The number one choice was a handwritten "thank-you" card. Additional suggestions from the survey included small tokens such as coffee or gift cards.

Implications-It is imperative to create or reconstruct preceptor recognition programs that will effectively recognize the hard work and value of RNs who dedicate their extra time and experience to the development of future and current RNs. By using the strategies discussed in this paper, preceptor programs have the potential for increased retention, decreased "burnout" and increased feelings of value from preceptor RNs. More research needs to be conducted as there are not many studies addressing rewarding and recognizing nurse preceptors.

The role of the Registered Nurse (RN) preceptor is multifaceted and requires an expert RN working as a teacher, mentor and cheerleader. As an essential resource to the new or student nurse, Omansky (2010) described that the preceptor functions “as a role model, teaching clinical skills and clinical thinking” (p. 698). RN staffing shortages are projected to increase indicating the need to retain nurses in their roles (Omansky, 2010). The training of new nurses is essential to begin to meet this need. Healthcare organizations across the spectrum are struggling to meet their staffing and training needs (Omansky, 2010). Having adequately trained and available preceptors continues to be a challenge. Omansky reported that “the preceptorship concept is a response to the nursing faculty shortage”(Udlis, 2008). Finding a skilled group of preceptors who can, and want to perform this task, is of key importance. Recognizing the challenges of the role and honoring those doing the work is also essential.

The burnout rate of RN preceptors appears to relate to the amount of reward or recognition the preceptor receives from their employer (Omansky, 2010). The question becomes, what type of recognition will increase preceptor role satisfaction and ultimately retainment at PHSJMC.

Significance

Given the stressors being experienced by our healthcare system, it is even more important that preceptors be cultivated and supported so that recruitment and retention can meet the needs of the setting. In repeated studies, preceptors have reported “there is considerable stress and responsibility associated with precepting or mentoring.” (Omansky, 2010, p.697). RN preceptors report issues with ambiguity of their role, time and work requirement overload, and inadequate

training which leads to dissatisfaction (Haggerty, Holloway, & Wilson, 2012). In a qualitative study performed in 2010, Luhanga found that as a result of the lack of training and education provided, essential preceptor activities are often performed utilizing trial and error as the primary tool for learning how to be effective. Similar findings were reinforced by the qualitative study performed by Goss in 2015. There is an obligation for the nurse preceptor to provide the needed training to the new RN therefore needing to have training time themselves in an effort to clarify expectations of the role as preceptor.

Challenges and Barriers

The importance of understanding what is expected of the preceptor role is often understated. Omansky's review of the literature found that in every country where studies had been done, stress related to role overload and ambiguity was reported by preceptors. "It appeared to be the result of managers and co-workers not understanding what the preceptor role entailed and viewed the nurse preceptor as having additional help, when in actuality the preceptor had additional responsibilities" (Omansky, 2010, p.701).

Omansky points out that when preceptors have additional time and resources they are better able to begin addressing the learning needs of preceptees in a meaningful way. In one study, Goss noted a reduction in RN turnover by nearly 50%, a decrease in medication errors by 50%, as well as a reduction in falls and adverse events with the implementation of a multifaceted preceptorship program (2015, p.E12). By identifying the individualized learning needs of each new nurse the preceptor can gear the teaching toward their areas of need. Ensuring that

preceptors have the resources required, and feel they can be successful in their role is essential to creating job satisfaction and promoting retention.

Preceptors report time constraints, documentation requirements, as well as dedicated time to reflect on a preceptees learning and challenges pose significant barriers. The pervasiveness of these reports demonstrates the frustration felt by preceptors globally (Haggerty et. al, 2012).

This study goes on to point out that these barriers create frustration in the preceptor because they do not feel they are fulfilling the needs of this role effectively, further leading to burnout and workload stresses (Haggerty et. al, 2012).

Conflicting Findings

One qualitative study indicated great satisfaction among preceptors, both with their sense of competence in the role and the support provided by managers and clinical educators. All participants in this study reported they had adequate support from leadership and two participants felt that although they had access to additional support, they didn't feel they required it (Tracey & McGowan, 2015). The rewards that are gained in the context of the preceptee-preceptor relationship and the connection to our nursing profession continues to drive positive experiences.

Recommendations

Healthcare institutions have the opportunity to invest in this valuable resource and have better prepared nurses, improved safety for patients, as well as a greater likelihood that preceptors continue in this role. (Goss, 2015 & Omansky, 2010) The components of an effective

preceptor program include providing the adequate resources and recognizing this role as valued in the clinical setting. Omansky recommends the following strategies; decreasing patient assignments for the mentor/preceptor, scheduling teaching time, providing opportunities for ongoing education for the preceptors and formalizing their role. It is important for organizations, managers and co-workers to recognize and provide a supportive environment (Omansky, 2010, p 702). In addition DiCicco (2008) identified that providing public recognition adds value to the role. By integrating public recognition and appreciation for the value added by effective preceptors, we have the opportunity to truly build this essential resource.

Evaluations/ Suggestions for PeaceHealth St Joseph's Medical Center

As a component of studying this issue, and it's application to PeaceHealth St. Joseph's Medical Center in Bellingham Washington, this committee developed a SurveyMonkey and emailed it to 133 current RN preceptors. Preceptors were asked to rate the following types of recognition in order of importance: breakfast or lunch date with preceptee at the end of the preceptorship to say "we did it", financial contribution towards continuing education (CEs) or a handwritten thank you note. Of the 53 respondents, nearly 50% of these chose a hand written thank you note as their number one choice. An additional comments section included responses that included gift cards or public recognition. Some RNs responded that they were grateful for the opportunity to participate. The survey revealed that small tokens would have a significant impact and personal meaning to a preceptor. Not only will it increase preceptor satisfaction, it will decrease turnover, increase new nurse retention and create an atmosphere that the institutions can provide the support needed (Biggs L., Schriener,C.L, 2010 & Goss, C.R., 2015). Evaluating the success of the interventions may be performed by integrating a similar survey

monkey in a year. Overall data regarding RN preceptor turnover in the past and future would also serve as a measurement tool.

Conclusion

It is imperative to continue to form or reconstruct preceptor recognition programs that will effectively recognize the hard work and value of RNs that dedicate their extra time and experience to the development of future and current RNs. Utilizing a multifaceted approach, which may include personal and public recognition and/or small tokens of appreciation, we can provide a supportive environment for preceptors to do their job well and increase job satisfaction and retention. Many studies continue to show, that preceptors who feel their work has intrinsic value and is connected to the mission and the future of nursing, the greater likelihood that they will feel satisfaction with the role, and remain in it.

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