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Emergency Department Nurse Preceptor Development

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Executive Summary

Introduction of the Problem

Emergency nurses work in a fast-paced, complex care environment requiring rapid assessments of a diverse patient population, critical thinking skills, and the ability to prioritize high-risk situations. The new graduate nurse (NGN) in the emergency department (ED) needs an orientation that is tailored to working in this complex care environment (Zaleski, 2019). A successful ED nursing orientation incorporates multiple active learning strategies, including didactic learning, realistic simulation experiences, hands-on skill acquisition, and hands-on patient care with a competent and effective preceptor (Zaleski, 2019). The NGN preceptor serves as a safety net and role model who can positively impact the retention of newly graduated ED nurses in their first year (Zaleski, 2019). Therefore, a competent and capable preceptor is essential for the new graduate ED nurse orientation process (Zaleski, 2019).

To develop confidence and knowledge, preceptors should receive education and training in several areas, including adult learning theory, delivering effective feedback and performance evaluations, developing clinical reasoning skills, and handling conflict (Zaleski, 2019). The project site lacked preceptor training specific to the ED nurse. With inadequate preceptor preparation and training, the NGN and preceptor relationship can be strained, ineffective, and negatively impact learning (Lee et al., 2017). Further, Chan and colleagues found that adequate training could improve the overall effectiveness of the preceptorship (2019). An emergency nurse preceptor workshop was developed and implemented at the project site. Workshop elements included recognizing and understanding the learning style preference of the adult learner, feedback and performance evaluation group exercises using video simulation, and live simulation experiences for developing the clinical reasoning skills of the NGN.

Literature Review

The literature search aimed to determine if training and educating the nurse preceptor improved their confidence and competence. The literature search included the following databases: CINAHL, PubMed, Medline, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. Key search terms were preceptor, nurse preceptor, new graduate registered nurse, preceptor training programs, emergency nurse preceptor training, preceptor training using simulation, and virtual simulation in nursing education. The search yielded 9,787 research articles. After the initial search of the literature, the articles were filtered for full text available, systematic review or meta-analysis, published on or after 2017, and research articles only. The project lead established the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the literature, and the final selection of literature included the most appropriate and applicable to the aim of this project.

The literature reviewed supported the concept that preceptor education and training effectively improved the preceptor's knowledge and skills in the preceptor role. Defining competence guided the development of education and training for the ED nurse preceptor. The competent nurse preceptor can develop the NGN clinical reasoning skills, provide practical and appropriate feedback and performance evaluations, and demonstrate the ability to resolve conflict (Chan et al., 2019). Preceptor training, guided by adult learning principles, should include active learning through hands-on group activities, simulation experiences, and clinical case scenarios (Liu et al., 2019). Online learning can be used as a method of education and training for the nurse preceptor as it allows flexibility for the learner (Wu et al., 2019). Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of online learning for preceptor training (Wu et al., 2019). To develop the clinical reasoning skills of the NGN, a study by Liao et al. (2019) found that using case scenarios on real-life clinical situations helped the preceptor guide the

NGN to identify clinical problems and determine solutions for the issues. In the preceptor workshop highlighted in the study by Liao et al. (2019), the preceptors learned how to use teaching steps, including why it happened, what the nurse could do next, and how it worked. After participation in the workshop, participants self-reported the ability to apply the knowledge and skills learned in real-life situations (Liao et al., 2019). A trained nurse preceptor can impact the new graduate nurses' ability to provide safe patient care and assist in transitioning into independent nursing practice.

Project Methods

Based on the literature review, the nurse preceptor that received education and training positively impacted the new nurse's transition to independent practice. Education themes for preceptor training that emerged from the literature review included identifying the individuals' learning style preferences, providing feedback and evaluating performance, facilitating difficult conversations, and developing clinical reasoning skills. Effective teaching methods specified for the preceptor workshop were case studies, group discussions, role-play, and simulation experiences. The project's purpose was to create an immersive, interactive experience for the ED nurse preceptors' development in the role. The project goals included interactive and engaging teaching methods that provided a realistic learning experience for the ED nurse preceptor, thereby developing the confidence and competence of the ED nurse preceptor.

The preceptor workshop was implemented at a Midwest academic teaching hospital with an emergency department that sees approximately 70,000 patients annually. The facility is a Level I trauma center, a comprehensive stroke center, and partners with an academic residency program. Before implementing the preceptor workshop, the project leader obtained approval

from the facilities nursing research committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Evaluation

Evaluation methods used for the project were a pre-and post-survey design. All participants completed surveys at the beginning of the workshop and completion. Additional data collection post-workshop will include the new graduate ED nurse evaluating the performance of preceptors that did or did not attend the workshop. Data collected on the pre-workshop surveys (n = 14) had participants' demographics, six questions using a Likert scale on their confidence and knowledge levels as a nurse preceptor, and three questions for open-ended comments for qualitative data. On the pre- and post-workshop surveys, the participants ranked confidence and knowledge levels on a scale of 1-5, with the value of 1 as "Not at all Confident" or "Not at all Knowledgeable" and the value of 5 representing "Extremely Confident" or "Extremely Knowledgeable". Post-workshop, the participants (n = 16) completed a survey with six questions using a Likert scale on their confidence and knowledge as a nurse preceptor and three questions for open-ended comments. The open-ended comments sought information on what the participants found the most helpful and the least helpful and the strategies they planned to use in their preceptor practice.

The post-workshop quantitative data review yielded positive changes in all areas surveyed. Although the quantitative data may be skewed due to two participants' lack of pre-workshop surveys, the results are encouraging for the overall effectiveness of the workshop. In the pre-workshop study, two participants reported they were "Not At All Confident" in the preceptor role, and there were zero responses to that domain in the post-workshop survey. Overall confidence in the preceptor role increased to a weighted average of 3.69 post-workshop

compared to the pre-workshop average of 2.79. Each part of the pre-and post-workshop surveys demonstrated a positive increase in the weighted average. The qualitative and quantitative data highlighted communication as necessary for a nurse preceptor on the pre-workshop survey. The pre-workshop weighted average for providing constructive feedback was 3.14, and the post-workshop average was 3.94. The weighted average for confidence in providing written performance evaluations using a rubric increased from 2.57 pre-workshop to 3.88 post-workshop.

Qualitative data from the post-workshop surveys yielded positive responses on the overall effectiveness of the workshop. Participant comments post-workshop reported increased confidence as a preceptor, and the participants identified specific strategies to incorporate into their practice as a preceptor. The activities and strategies identified as most helpful were simulations, debriefing, and identifying the individual learning style of the orientee. The content found least valuable in the workshop was the prioritization of care exercise and the evaluation rubric. However, the participants reported increased confidence in performing formal written and online evaluations using an evaluation rubric (2.57 pre-workshop, 3.88 post-workshop).

The final surveys to be completed are the new graduate nurse end-orientation surveys to rate the preceptors. At the time of writing, there was an inadequate response ($n = 1$) to the study, with seven pending responses. The respondent scored the preceptor high in all domains, including the assessment of the individual learning style and specific teaching strategies the preceptor used effectively.

Limitations in the project included a small sample size, and the project was limited to one hospital in the five-hospital group. The workshop participants have previously worked with the project leader during their orientation, which may lead to bias in the survey results. Another

limitation of the survey results is that the pre-and post-results do not have the same number of participants' responses. This difference may have affected the analysis of the survey responses, and the results may not be as significant. Overall, the completed project results are positive and encouraging for the effectiveness of orientation training received by the preceptor for this respondent.

Impact on Practice

Identified short-term impact of the preceptor workshop is the improved confidence of the participants in the nurse preceptor role. The long-term impact is difficult to ascertain currently. The participants identified feelings of confidence in using strategies learned in the workshop and seeking mentoring when difficult situations arise. A short-term impact in practice is improved communication between the preceptor and the orientee. This has been noted through routine shift evaluations and leadership meetings, which are components of the orientation curriculum. However, this may take a significant amount of time to see the overall impact to care delivery in the ED. The short-term impact of the preceptor workshop is positive and encouraging to have substantial benefits to the individual preceptor and the new graduate nurse.

To address the limitations, the project leader will consider offering the preceptor workshop to all affiliate ED preceptors in the health system. Based on survey responses, workshop modifications will include addressing the content sections found to be least helpful, which consists of the evaluation rubric exercise and the prioritization of care exercise. To address the inadequate preceptor survey response, the project leader will increase communication about completing surveys and partner with the preceptors to improve compliance.

Conclusion

Preceptors and nursing orientation aid the new graduate nurse transitioning into independent practice. The nurse preceptor is integral to the new graduate nurses' ability to provide safe patient care and integrate into the nursing role. Preceptors that have not received education and training may not possess the necessary skills to teach the new graduate nurse safe patient care practices. Active learning strategies included role-play, simulation, and case studies to facilitate practical preceptor training. The preceptor workshop provided teaching methods for the ED nurse preceptor to address communication, clinical reasoning, and performance evaluations of the ED new graduate nurse. The initial results of the project are encouraging for a long-term impact on the project site. Further research is needed to determine the long-term effect of the ED nurse preceptor training workshop.

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