

Successful Transition From Staff Nurse to Nurse Manager

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A vacant position in management creates an opportunity for aspiring staff to move up to a management role or for talented staff to be tapped for such a role. Though some staff may seek career advancement proactively, other staff may not plan it at

the time it happens. Some facilities may have formal leadership development programs for aspiring staff to be prepared for a manager position or a formal succession planning to get staff ready to move into new manager role when the opportunity arises.

The nurse manager role is critical in staff satisfaction and retention, safety and quality of care, and achieving organizational goals. The American Organization of Nurse Executives reports an average of 8% vacancy in nursing management nationwide, a fact compounded by the upcoming retirement intent of a big component of nurse managers).¹

Moving into a new manager role can be both exciting and intimidating. Some skills learned over time as a charge nurse can help the staff ease into the new role. Most healthcare organizations offer a novice nurse manager a few days of orientation, which is geared more towards an experienced manager new to the organization.

PROMOTION

Promotion is one of many ways of recognizing staff contributions and value, representing reward and recognition of the work accomplished. Most of the time, promotion is based on clinical proficiency. Charge nurse is a leadership role that provides experience on taking a higher perspective of the whole shift and not just one's own assignment. The role hones the ability to influence others towards a common goal. The staff turns to the closest leader for clinical expertise and problem-solving skills. The charge nurse role provides some training for a manager role, but it is not enough to make a successful new nurse manager.

Promoting an employee within an area in which he or she is already familiar helps in focusing energy to learn the new role. Being promoted in an area different from previous clinical experience is harder to navigate. Clinical expertise in the area is a skill that provides credibility to the new manager with the staff and other care team members. The new manager can use this proficiency to boost confidence in front of staff and patients alike.

The functions and tasks of a new manager role can be overwhelming. The new nurse manager role will require constant prioritization of competing demands. Organizational skills required to resolve concerns, provide follow-ups, and meet deadlines will help the new manager to complete work timely and methodically. Oftentimes, a little anxiety can fuel learning and provide excitement to excel in the new role. A broad range of extreme emotions overcome a new manager after a promotion—elation, confidence that you can fix everything, fear of failure, and feelings of inadequacy related to lack of experience in the new role.

There are several challenges to overcome when one is promoted from within the department. If another staff member applied for the same job and is not chosen, it may create animosity towards the new leader. Sometimes, the feeling of rejection can lead to opposition and hinder the new manager's ability to succeed. This may serve to justify or exacerbate feelings that the selection process was flawed. A new manager's previous friendships can pose an additional challenge. Old friends may still perceive the new manager as equal or inferior, requiring the specific role clarification.

Transitioning from the role of staff nurse to manager in a new organization is the most arduous. Learning the system, culture, routine, people, and a new manager role can prove

daunting and very overwhelming. If opportunities within one's department or institution are not available, a staff nurse may pursue personal goals at another institution. One advantage of joining a new department or organization is that old relationships do not pose a challenge.

ORIENTATION/MENTORSHIP/LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Although most hospitals have structured new staff nurse orientation, very few have an organized transition process from staff nurse to a manager role. Most often the opportunity is created by a need when a position is vacated either voluntarily or involuntarily. If the position is not given to an experienced manager, a staff member who shows potential in leadership may be promoted. The new manager will be assigned a mentor. The quality of the mentorship is dependent on time and ability of the preceptor.

Oftentimes, the new manager is needed to function readily at high level because of a crisis situation. At times, a high expectation is placed on the new manager to figure out how to function in the new role or to know how to function in the new role. This creates undue stress and may contribute to a high turnover rate for managers.

An organization's structured orientation for new managers is essential to understand the priorities and to be able to help the department achieve targets. The manager then can effectively support staff, provide resources, and implement processes and systems to reach goals. The process starts with learning the different systems managers use in their daily work. Discussed at this time are available resources, processes, critical policies, and procedures. Included in the orientation process are important human resources or employee relations concepts that are critical to manager and staff relationship.

Coping effectively is one of the most crucial skills that a new manager needs to develop. Challenges and stressors are usually different from those encountered at a staff level. Decisions required at the manager level are different in nature and scope. The ability to avoid taking things personally is a learned behavior and skill that requires time to learn not to react, but to respond in a controlled manner. The ability to respond appropriately is half of the skill set a new manager needs to learn in order to cope effectively to prevent becoming burned out.

The mentor can provide a trusting relationship that the new manager needs in order to develop higher-level skills. Mentors may be different individuals as resource persons for different needs. The mentor can help the new manager with decision-making skills in a safe setting. The new manager can discuss difficult events to develop a decision or sound off a decision made. The mentor can help the manager understand different perspectives and provide useful strategies in managing emotions. The relationship between mentor and manager can help build the new manager's self-confidence and provide emotional support.

CRUCIAL INITIAL 3 MONTHS

The first three months are critical in establishing relationships and credibility. During this time, the new manager creates the

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