



Development of a situational initiation training program for preceptors to retain new graduate nurses: Process and initial outcomes



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SUMMARY

Background: Most preceptor training programs consist of classroom-based courses, and only a few programs are conducted using films. Preceptors have identified most training courses as inapplicable in various clinical situations.

Objectives: To describe the systematic development of a situational initiation training program (SITP) for preceptors and to evaluate its impacts on the stress levels of preceptors and new graduate nurses (NGNs), the preceptor–NGN relationship, support provided by preceptors to NGNs, and the intention to leave among NGNs during a 1-year preceptorship.

Design: The conceptual framework of development, implementation, and evaluation was used for program completion.

Participants and Settings: Preceptors and NGNs working at a teaching medical center in Taipei participated.

Methods: The 1-day SITP workshop comprised four films, reflection time, and four classroom-based courses. Training outcomes were evaluated using a questionnaire survey for preceptors and NGNs at months 3, 6, 9, and 12 after employing the NGNs. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and analysis of variance with repeated measures.

Results: The annual turnover rate of NGNs was 10.5%. During the first preceptorship year, the NGNs reported moderate stress levels, good to excellent relationships with their preceptors, moderate to excellent support from their preceptors, and low intention to leave their current jobs. Similarly, preceptors reported moderate stress levels, except at month 12 (mean = 4.8), and good to excellent relationships with their NGNs. The SITP considerably improved the preceptor–NGN relationship for both NGNs and preceptors, whereas no improvement was observed in the stress levels, except in the stress levels of preceptors.

Conclusions: The SITP is clinically effective for preceptors; thus, nurse educators may apply the SITP for redesigning the existing preceptor training programs to develop highly skilled preceptors and improve training outcomes.

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Introduction

Retaining new graduate nurses (NGNs) is a major challenge for most nurse educators in acute care hospitals. According to Flinkman and Salanterä (2014), the first year of clinical practice for NGNs is extremely stressful; therefore, most NGNs quit their jobs during this period. Preceptor training programs have been offered to experienced nurses in

hospitals worldwide to effectively increase NGN retention, to reduce their reality shock, and to help preceptors obtain all the knowledge and skills required to mentor, communicate, interact, and support NGN transition from novice to advanced beginners (Marks-Maran et al., 2013; Edwards et al., 2015; Ke and Hsu, 2015; Whitehead et al., 2015), including in teaching hospitals in Taiwan since 2007 (Yin, 2013). However, because of cultural and clinical situation differences in hospitals and countries, preceptors have evaluated most preceptor training programs developed by individual hospitals as impractical and inapplicable in clinical situations (Tsai et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2015). Therefore, the present preceptor training programs and delivery methods should be re-examined or redesigned to reduce the training gap and prevent further complications.

The preceptorship assists NGNs develop clinical competency and confidence and enhance their clinical experience, but preceptors and

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NGNs have experienced tremendous stress during one-on-one preceptorship (Dawson et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2015). Some preceptors have reported difficulty in building an effective relationship with NGNs because of a lack of time (Myers et al., 2010; Omansky, 2010; Matua et al., 2014). Hence, studies have suggested that health organizations must train preceptors to effectively interact with NGNs and to increase time, support, and attention to NGNs in order to reduce NGN frustration and turnover intention (Gaskill, 1993; Muir et al., 2013; Condrey, 2015). Clipper and Cherry (2015) indicated that a well-trained preceptor is capable of supporting and providing feedback to NGNs during transition and influencing first-year retention. However, a supportive preceptor requires mental, physical, and emotional preparation to construct a nurturing environment for NGNs (Washington, 2013). Thus, for preceptor training programs to be successful, preceptors must be well prepared in these crucial areas to effectively guide, teach, and mentor NGNs during the daunting transition.

Nevertheless, in relevant nursing literature, approximately all preceptor training programs were conducted in a classroom-based environment and rarely involved input from preceptors in designing the training content (Foy et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2015). However, preceptorship is an active experience, and some training courses may not be appropriately taught in the classroom (Epstein and Carlin, 2012; Bell et al., 2014). Furthermore, several teaching strategies, such as role plays, films, and videos, have not been delivered to preceptors; these strategies markedly enhance the preceptor–NGN relationship and improve reflective learning (Valente and Wright, 2007; Halabi et al., 2012). Scant research has involved assessing the stress levels of preceptors and NGNs, the preceptor–NGN relationship, support from preceptors, and the intention to leave among NGNs. Therefore, in this study, we designed a situational initiation training program (SITP) for augmenting current preceptor training programs and preparing preceptors for complex situations during preceptorship, thus enhancing mutual understanding during preceptorship. This paper describes the systematic development of the SITP for preceptors and its impacts on the stress levels of preceptors and NGNs, the preceptor–NGN relationship, support provided by preceptors to NGNs, and the intention to leave among NGNs during the first preceptorship year. Our results may be valuable for nurse educators in training experienced nurses to become qualified preceptors and helping preceptors more clearly understand NGNs, improving the preceptor–NGN relationship. Furthermore, if NGNs receive more support from their preceptors during their first year of practice, the intention of NGNs to leave can be reduced and they can be retained.

Literature Review

Because of the nursing shortage and high turnover rates in Taiwan and other developed countries, many hospitals have implemented preceptor training programs for providing experienced nurses with the knowledge and skills necessary for mentoring and retaining NGNs (Taiwan Joint Commission on Hospital Accreditation, 2014). Whitehead et al. (2015) reported that an effective preceptorship program improves the confidence, competence, retention rates, and critical thinking skills of NGNs and reduces the stress and anxiety of preceptors and NGNs. However, some shortcomings of these programs have been reported. Tsai et al. (2014) reported that the content of preceptor training courses varies among hospitals, and most courses are not evaluated by preceptors or do not consider the learning requirements of preceptors. In addition, many researchers have observed that, because most preceptor training courses are offered in classrooms, the knowledge and situational clinical mentoring skills of preceptors remain inadequate after course completion (Yang et al., 2011; Broadbent et al., 2014). Furthermore, Foy et al. (2013) reported that many nurse preceptor training program designs do not involve need-based input from preceptors. Therefore, the previous experience of preceptors in training courses should be considered while Moreover, a novel approach for preceptor training should be created to reduce the stress levels of NGNs,

facilitate building a positive preceptor–NGN relationship, support NGNs, and reduce the intention of NGNs to leave during the first year of employment.

Ke and Hsu (2015) reported that the preceptorship relationship can be built in three stages—start-up, growth, and maturity—in Eastern cultures such as in Taiwan. In the start-up stage, a preceptor and an NGN are introduced to each other, and a relationship is established through mutual understanding. In the growth stage, this interpersonal relationship is developed through trust and frequent interaction. In the maturity stage, a long-term relationship is maintained between the preceptor and the NGN. Both preceptors and NGNs experience stress, anxiety, and several challenges during preceptorship; these difficulties are particularly pronounced for NGNs because they are newly employed (Chen et al., 2011; Clark and Springer, 2012; Halabi et al., 2012; Marks-Maran et al., 2013; Muir et al., 2013). Matua et al. (2014) reported that lack of time was one of the main challenges encountered by preceptors while building relationships with preceptees. Kaddoura (2013) indicated that a lack of preparation by preceptors was a factor affecting the preceptor–NGN relationship. Thus, if preceptors can understand how preceptorship develops and how NGNs behave during preceptor training, preceptors can flexibly use the learned knowledge and skills to gradually create a supportive environment for NGNs. Thus, preceptorship relationship can considerably benefit NGNs by reducing their stress levels and intention to leave the present job.

Nevertheless, preceptor training programs do not immediately train experienced nurses to become caring and competent preceptors and teach them to effectively retain NGNs. Dawson et al. (2014) and Flinkman and Salanterä (2014) have reported that poor support or a lack of support affects the turnover of nurses. Block et al. (2005) identified several essential components of preceptorship other than organizational factors, including support, guidance, socialization, empowerment, education, and well-being. Furthermore, Schumacher (2007) observed that caring interaction or behavior is essential for a positive preceptor–NGN relationship. Modic and Harris (2007) identified effective listening as an educational topic required for preceptors to successfully build a trustful relationship with NGNs. Matua et al. (2014) reported that positive communication, showing appreciation and acknowledgment, providing timely feedback, and spending time together are effective strategies for building a healthy preceptor–preceptee relationship. Therefore, preceptor training must involve the aforementioned components, which can help preceptors understand, communicate with, interact with, and guide NGNs to build a mutual, respectful, and constructive relationship. Thus, NGNs can be retained.

Method

This study was conducted at an 818-bed teaching medical center in Taiwan from February 2013 to September 2014. Development (SITP and questionnaire development), implementation (potential preceptor selection and training, SITP implementation, and preceptor–NGN match), and evaluation (Fig. 1) constituted the conceptual framework of the study. This framework was applied by Gaskill (1993) to develop formal mentoring programs in business. A detailed description is provided herein.

Development

At the development stage, we focused on developing the situational initiation training program (SITP) and study questionnaire. The SITP content was determined according to suggestions and feedback from preceptors in a previous 3-year study (Chang et al., 2015), and we decided that the SITP would be conducted as a 1-day workshop. The SITP training was completed in a 9-hour session comprised of four films and discussion and reflection sessions (4 h) and four courses (5 h). The four courses covered preceptor roles, functions, and responsibilities (1 h); communication skills (1.5 h); stress management skills (1.5 h);

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