



A preceptorship programme for newly qualified nurses: A study of preceptees' perceptions ☆☆☆



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SUMMARY

Aim: This paper presents the evaluation of a preceptorship programme for newly-qualified nurses (NQNs) to determine preceptee engagement with the preceptorship programme, and the impact, value and sustainability of the programme from the preceptees' perspectives.

Background: The literature suggests that NQNs find the transition from student to qualified nurse to be stressful and that preceptorship can reduce this stress and promote adaptation to the new role.

Setting: This study took place in one NHS Healthcare Trust in South West London, UK.

Participants: Ninety NQNs were invited to participate in the study and the response rate was 48.9% (n = 44). The study took place in 2011.

Methods: Evaluative research design was used incorporating a fourfold evaluation framework of preceptee engagement, impact, value and sustainability (Ooms et al., 2011). This was a mixed methods study. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through questionnaires, reflective journals and through personal audio recordings made by the preceptees. Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics and t-tests, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess reliability of impact and value scales. In addition analysis of open-ended questions and qualitative data was undertaken using the Framework Method of analysis.

Findings: Findings show that preceptee engagement in the programme was high and preceptorship was highly valued by the majority of preceptees (85%). Preceptors played a positive role in terms of alleviating stress. Preceptorship impacted positively on preceptees in terms of development of communication skills and clinical skills, and role, personal and professional development. In addition, preceptees felt that the programme was of value despite acknowledging difficulties in making time to meet with preceptors. Preceptees also indicated that they would wish to be preceptors in the future and that they would recommend preceptorship to all nurses who are either newly qualified or new in role.

Preceptees judged the preceptorship programme positively for engagement, impact, value and sustainability.

Conclusion: The study is unique when mapped against other research studies as it explores a breadth of evaluative issues not found in other preceptorship studies, e.g. engagement, impact, value and sustainability of preceptorship. The study adds insights about sustainability of preceptorship programmes and expectations of competence of NQNs that do not appear in previous literature about preceptorship.

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☆ There are no conflicts of interests.

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Introduction

The transition from student to newly qualified nurse (NQN) has long been identified as a difficulty and to support this mentor/preceptorship has commenced in many countries. Within the United Kingdom (UK) the Department for Health in England (DH) has produced a framework for preceptorship to help NQNs, also referred to in the UK as Band 5 nurses, to make this transition (DH, 2010). Most jobs in the National Health Service (NHS) of the UK are covered by the Agenda for Change (DH, 2004) pay scales from Bands 1–9. Band 5 is the level of entry as a qualified nurse following graduation.

A research study was undertaken to evaluate the perceptions of NQNs in one National Health Service (NHS) Trust who undertook a preceptorship programme to help them through this transition period. The DH preceptorship framework formed the basis for the preceptorship programme provided by the Trust and an evaluative study was commissioned which used a fourfold educational evaluative framework. This framework is described and explained later in the paper.

Through this evaluative framework, NQN perceptions of their preceptorship programme were studied in terms of their engagement with the preceptorship programme, the impact of the programme on preceptees, the value of the programme and the sustainability of the preceptorship programme. No studies reported in the literature evaluate preceptees' perceptions in this comprehensive way.

The focus of this paper is to present the implementation of the preceptorship programme in one NHS Trust as a collaborative initiative between the Trust and a nurse education provider (health care faculty in a university), and the results of the evaluative study undertaken into the perceptions of preceptees. Further studies are necessary to determine the usefulness of this approach to evaluative study of preceptorship.

Background and Literature Review

In the United Kingdom preceptorship is described as a short-term relationship between an NQN (preceptee) and an experienced person (preceptor) who provides individual attention to the novice's learning needs and provides feedback regarding performance, enabling NQNs to experience relative independence in making decisions, setting priorities, time-management, and patient care activities (O'Toole, 2003). Terminology about preceptorship versus mentorship varies in the literature despite the fact that the differences between the two have not been explored critically. Many studies (primarily from the United States, Canada and Australia) tend to use the term "preceptorship" to describe the relationship between student nurse and the qualified nurse who supervises that student in placements (e.g. Corlett et al., 2000; Billay and Myrick, 2007). In the United Kingdom (UK), this relationship is usually termed "mentorship," e.g., Myall et al. (2008) who explored the role of mentors for student nurses.

Other international (non-British) studies (e.g., Halfer et al., 2008; Beecroft et al., 2006) employ the term "mentorship" to describe the relationship between an experienced practitioner and an NQN, a relationship which in the UK is usually described as "preceptorship." For this paper, preceptorship is defined as a process designed to enable the NQN to make the transition between student and qualified practitioner, guided by an experience qualified nurse.

Preceptorship has been recognised as being an important part of helping NQNs make the transition from student to qualified nurse (Gerrish, 2000; Hardyman and Hickey, 2001; Ross and Clifford, 2002; Glen, 2009). Beecroft et al. (2006) for example found that those NQNs who met with their mentor (preceptor) on a regular basis experienced a reduction in stress. However, logistical problems existed with regard to having regular meetings which prevented a successful relationship between NQN and mentor (preceptor). These included recruiting sufficient and appropriate mentors (preceptors) lack of time, absence

of commitment, constraints related to scheduling meetings, varied support from managers to enable release from the unit to meet with mentors and training for both mentors (preceptors) and NQNs.

Pre-registration nursing programmes do not equip nurses with the necessary knowledge and skills to make this transition (Maben and Macleod-Clark, 1998). NQNs experience anxiety, stress, uncertainty and a lack of confidence (Brown and Edelmann, 2000; Clark and Holmes, 2007; Duchscher and Myrick, 2008; Ferguson, 2010). Kaviani and Stillwell (2000) suggested that preceptorship involves

"...access to an experienced and competent role model and a means of building a supportive one-to-one teaching and learning relationship. This relationship tends to be short-lived..., assisting the newly qualified [nurse] to adjust to the nursing role" (Kaviani and Stillwell, 2000, p. 219).

More recently, preceptorship in the UK is linked to the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) (Department of Health, 2003), and is designed to enable career development over time, as well as to support the transition from student to qualified nurse (Scottish Executive Health Department, 2001; Department of Health, 2003; Roxburgh et al., 2010; Banks et al., 2011).

As such, preceptorship is designed to address concerns about the low expectations of competence of NQNs in the NHS, who feel ill-prepared for their new role (Andrews et al., 2005; Banks et al., 2011). Studies demonstrate similar concerns in Scotland (Roxburgh et al., 2010), Australia (Greenwood, 2000), South Africa (Moeti et al., 2004), and in Israel (Greenberger et al., 2005). Programmes such as Flying Start in Scotland (Roxburgh et al., 2010; Banks et al., 2011), have been established to ease the transition from student to qualified nurse, and to promote retention of trained nurses. In the USA, Hayes and Scott (2007) reported that between 35% and 69% of newly qualified nursing graduates leave their place of employment within the first year and nationally, the nurse turnover rate in the USA is approximately 60%. No equivalent turnover statistics for the UK were found in the literature.

Persaud (2008) found that a mentorship programme to enable NQNs make the transition to operating department nurse was positively evaluated and enabled this transition. In addition, retention was significantly increased. Improved retention following a preceptorship programme was also reported by Halfer et al. (2008).

Beecroft et al. (2006) in a study in the US found that 54% of the newly qualified nurses on a programme for NQNs met regularly with their designated mentor. The majority felt supported in their role and reported decreased stress. Where mentors did not find time to meet with their NQNs regularly they felt unsupported and their stress levels remained high. Bain (1996) found that the literature addresses five issues related to preceptorship of NQNs: role definition; selection of preceptor; the nature of preceptorship programme; the experience of preceptorship and the limitations of preceptorship. More recent reviews added to this list to include intergenerational context of preceptorship (Earle et al., 2011), characteristics of good preceptors (Ferguson, 2010) clinical skills development and responsibility and accountability (Higgins et al., 2010).

With regard to the evaluative studies of preceptorship reviewed in the literature, the majority focused on descriptive and/or impact studies; no studies appeared to employ a comprehensive evaluative framework, identified previously, which explores preceptee engagement with the programme, impact, value of the programme and the sustainability of preceptorship.

Context of the Study

St George's Healthcare NHS Trust in the United Kingdom (UK), in collaboration with Kingston University/St George's, University of London (KU/SGUL) commenced a development programme for NQNs. A model for NQN development was devised for the project

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