



## Preceptors' perceptions of a preceptorship programme for newly qualified nurses <sup>☆,☆☆</sup>

Jenny Muir <sup>a,1</sup>, Ann Ooms <sup>b,2</sup>, Jen Tapping <sup>b,3</sup>, Di Marks-Maran <sup>c,\*</sup>, Sonia Phillips <sup>a,4</sup>, Linda Burke <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> St George's Healthcare NHS Trust, Blackshaw Road, London SW17 0QT, United Kingdom

<sup>b</sup> KU/SGUL, Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences, St George's University of London, Cranmer Terrace, London SW170RE, United Kingdom

<sup>c</sup> Kingston University and St George's University of London, 30 Beacon Crescent, Tilford Road, Hindhead, Surrey GU26 6UG, United Kingdom

<sup>d</sup> School of Health and Social Care, University of Greenwich, Old Royal Naval College, Park Row, London SE10 9LS, United Kingdom

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### SUMMARY

**Background:** A study was undertaken into preceptors' perceptions of a preceptorship programme for newly-qualified nurses. The preceptorship programme is designed to enable newly qualified nurses to make the transition from student to registered nurse. Preceptors undergo a training programme to take on the role of preceptor.

**Objectives:** To evaluate the preceptors' perception of the preceptorship programme.

**Design:** Mixed method evaluative research design was used.

**Setting:** This study took place in one National Health Service Healthcare Trust in South West London, UK.

**Participants:** Ninety preceptors were invited to participate in the study and the response rate was 44.4% (n = 40). The study took place in 2011.

**Methods:** Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through questionnaires and one-to-one interviews with a convenience sample of preceptors. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, version 18; qualitative data were analysed using the Framework Method.

**Findings:** From the quantitative data seven themes emerged. These were preceptors' perceptions of: the personal development of preceptees; the role development of preceptees; the communication skills development of preceptees; the clinical development of preceptees; the development of professional relationships by preceptees; value of the preceptorship programme to the organisation and value of being a preceptor in terms of their own professional development. Qualitative analysis confirmed many of the findings from the statistical analysis and was used to triangulate those findings.

**Conclusions:** The preceptors largely viewed the preceptorship programme and their role within this programme positively. Although difficulties in making time to meet with preceptees was an issue, the preceptorship experience was perceived to have a positive impact on several aspects of preceptee development as well as on the organisation and on the preceptors' own development. The study is unique when mapped against other research studies because there is little in the literature about studies into preceptors' perceptions of preceptorship programmes.

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### Introduction and Background

St George's Healthcare NHS Trust in the United Kingdom (UK), in collaboration with the Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences at

Kingston University and St George's, University of London (KU/SGUL) commenced a collaborative development programme for newly qualified nurses (NQNs). In the UK, NQNs are identified as Band 5 nurses.

A comprehensive model of Band 5 (NQN) development was created which integrated induction, preceptorship, clinical supervision, role and leadership development, as well as skill and knowledge development in the clinical speciality. Like many National Health Service (NHS) Trusts, and in light of Department of Health (DH) guidelines for preceptorship, St George's Healthcare Trust wished to ensure that NQNs were able to make the successful transition from student to staff nurse. The intention was to enable NQNs to make this transition, to prevent attrition in NQNs and to provide a development programme for NQNs to enable them to progress. However, there are only a relatively small number of evaluative studies into preceptorship programmes, and few evaluate the perceptions of preceptors. Evaluative research studies were undertaken

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\* Corresponding author. +44 1428609600.

E-mail addresses: [Jenny.Muir@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:Jenny.Muir@stgeorges.nhs.uk) (J. Muir),

[A.Ooms@sgul.kingston.ac.uk](mailto:A.Ooms@sgul.kingston.ac.uk) (A. Ooms), [J.Tapping@sgul.kingston.ac.uk](mailto:J.Tapping@sgul.kingston.ac.uk) (J. Tapping),

[marksmaran@btopenworld.com](mailto:marksmaran@btopenworld.com) (D. Marks-Maran), [Sonia.Phillip1@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:Sonia.Phillip1@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

(S. Phillips), [Imburke@btinternet.com](mailto:Imburke@btinternet.com) (L. Burke).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +44 2082666329.

<sup>2</sup> Tel.: +44 7887665714.

<sup>3</sup> Tel.: +44 7598283689.

<sup>4</sup> Tel.: +44 7876502728.

into each of the components of the development programme. Prior to the implementation of the preceptorship programme a training programme for preceptors was implemented. To date, 237 experienced nurses have completed the preceptor training programme. The training programme was designed and delivered by the Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences at KU/SGUL in collaboration with the Trust and used interactive and experiential methods.

A research team was formed to undertake the evaluative study of the preceptorship programme from the perspectives of the preceptees Marks-Maran et al. (2012) and preceptors. This paper presents the second of these evaluative studies – the perceptions of the preceptors. This evaluative study is important because of the relative absence of studies into preceptors and their experiences. This study will help to understand the challenges of the preceptors' role.

## Literature Review

O'Toole (2003) defines preceptorship as a short-term relationship between a novice (preceptee) and an experienced person (preceptor) who provides individual attention to the novice's learning needs and provides feedback regarding performance, enabling novices to move towards making independent decisions, setting priorities, managing time, and providing skilled patient care. It is a process that has been used in health-related professions as a way of better enabling new practitioners to make the transition from student to qualified practitioner or from newly qualified practitioner to more experienced practitioner.

The literature often presents confusing terminology about preceptorship. In some countries the word "mentorship" is used to describe the process, while in others, especially in the UK, mentorship describes the relationship between student nurse and the qualified nurses who supervise them in practice placements. However, in some countries, the word "preceptorship" is used to describe the student–qualified nurse relationship and "mentorship" is used to describe the relationship between a NQN and experienced nurse. In their concept analysis of preceptorship Billay and Yonge (2004) found that preceptorship is quite different from mentorship. For this paper preceptorship is defined as a process designed to enable the newly-qualified nurse to make the transition between student and qualified nurse, guided by an experience qualified nurse. As such the literature review focuses on studies related to preceptors' experiences with NQNs. Nursing journals from The UK, North America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand were reviewed through Medline and CINAHL using keywords such as preceptorship, mentorship and newly qualified nurse.

For decades, it has been found that pre-registration nursing programmes do not necessarily equip nurses to make the transition from student to qualified nurse and to assume this new role (Maben and Macleod-Clark, 1998). A number of studies have found that NQNs suffer from anxiety, stress, uncertainty and lack of confidence (Brown and Edelmann, 2000; Duchscher and Myrick, 2008; Ferguson, 2011; Clark and Holmes, 2007). Preceptorship can be a way of ensuring the best possible start for NQNs and to maximise the training investment. As such, preceptorship is a structured transition phase that enables NQNs to develop their confidence, reduce stress and better apply their knowledge to their work environment.

Although there is ample literature available related to the experiences of preceptees, there is less available in the literature that examines the experiences of preceptors within the preceptorship relationship. Smith (2006) defines a preceptor as

*"a competent, confident, and experienced nurse who assists another nurse... in giving quality nursing care by guiding, directing, or training."* (Smith, 2006, p. 9).

The literature about the preceptor role appears to be divided into three themes. Firstly, there is literature related to the different aspects

of the preceptor role and training for the role. Hickey (2009) examined preceptors' perceptions of the competence of new graduate nurses and found that NQNs had several areas of weakness in their clinical skills and explored the role of preceptors in assisting NQNs in the development of their clinical skills. The particular skill weaknesses identified in Hickey's study were: psychomotor skills (e.g., drug administration, sterile dressings, catheter care, management of drains and tubes); patient assessment skills; critical thinking; time management; communication and team working. Hickey concluded that more needs to be done within the undergraduate pre-registration programme to better prepared nurses to make the transition to NQN, but in addition, preceptors need to be trained to take on the preceptor role. This study is interesting in that it focuses on the preceptor's role in helping the NQN to develop clinical skills. Findings from other studies (e.g. Ferguson, 2010) focused on how the preceptor develops team working in NQNs. Halfer (2007) explored the role of the preceptor in helping the NQN to develop confidence and competence, and to develop team relationships. The role of the preceptor as an educator has also been explored (Morton-Cooper and Palmer, 1993).

Secondly, literature was reviewed related to the importance of the preceptor role helping NQNs in the first year after graduation. Research shows that the preceptor plays an important part in the NQNs experiences, assisting them to identify and meet learning needs, helping to develop time management and orientating them to the ways of working in a particular clinical area while, at the same time, providing support as they face the challenges of being NQNs (Usher et al., 1999; Baltimore, 2004; Chisengantambu et al., 2005; Burns et al., 2006).

Thirdly, there is a small amount of literature that examines the characteristics of a good preceptor. Ferguson (2010) found that successful preceptors demonstrate a number of characteristics that contribute to successful preceptorship including being a strong positive role model, being someone who helps to integrate the NQN into the team by demonstrating supportive behaviours and is someone who shares knowledge and builds trust. Other literature supports the notion of preceptor as role model with good listening and questioning skills to enable the preceptee to develop the skills related to assuming responsibility for clinical decisions (Usher et al., 1999; Marquis and Huston, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Wright, 2002; Floyd, 2003; Burns et al., 2006). Being a positive role model was also cited by Baltimore (2004) who suggested that preceptors should be role models that other nurses strive to be like, who have patience, enthusiasm, knowledge, a sense of humour and the respect of their peers.

Haggerty (2002) found that effective preceptors are experienced nurses who are firstly able to reflect on their own practice and have the ability to articulate this to their preceptee. Preceptors need to have the skill of allowing the preceptee enough independence to make decisions and take on responsibilities to enable them to learn, whilst at the same time providing support. However, problems can arise when preceptors are merely chosen because they are available rather than because they have the appropriate skills for the role (Pigott, 2001).

Billay and Yonge (2004) suggested that future research is needed to address a number of issues related to preceptors and preceptorship including screening of preceptors, the preceptor–preceptee relationship, and preparation and reward for preceptors. Some studies have been carried out into the experiences of preceptors (which in the UK are termed 'mentors') of student nurses (e.g. Hallin and Danielson, 2008), but less is available in the literature about the experiences of those who act as preceptors for NQNs. One study (Chen et al., 2011) that looked at the views of 15 preceptors, identified three themes relating to the experiences of preceptors for NQNs: these were: application of a variety of teaching strategies; the burden of being a preceptor; and gaining a sense of achievement. Chin et al. concluded that the role of both a preceptor and nurse was perceived as being a challenge for preceptors because of their heavy workloads as a nurse and their fear of failure as a preceptor. Blozen (2010) echoed this fear

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