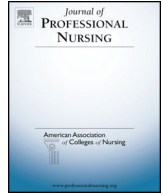




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Precepting: A literature review☆

Amanda Ward, Sara McComb*

Purdue University, School of Nursing, 502 N. University Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907, United States

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this literature review is to examine studies evaluating preceptorships within nursing orientation or education programs. Nursing education in the classroom focuses on the theoretical aspect of nursing care as opposed to the clinical experience of nursing education that allows for the hands-on practical experience of nursing. The clinical experience is an integral part of the education process for both students and experienced nurses at various career transitions. Quality clinical experiences require practice partnerships, particularly in the form of preceptorships. Using data reported in previous studies, we examined preceptor selection criteria and responsibilities, motivators to encourage nurses to serve as preceptors, and preceptors' and preceptees' perceptions about the preceptor role. By synthesizing the literature describing previous orientation programs, we underscore the importance of the preceptor in the precepting process associated with orientation or clinical education programs. This review culminates with an evidence-based design for devising policy governing preceptor programs. Specifically, suggestions are forwarded for (1) preceptor selection, preparation, responsibilities, support, and workload and (2) preceptee preparation and support.

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* Corresponding author.
 E-mail address: sara@purdue.edu (S. McComb).

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Introduction

The nursing shortage, increasing healthcare costs, and demand for better patient outcomes translates into a need for increased numbers of properly prepared nurses entering the workforce. The proper preparation of a nurse can lead to increased retention of nurses and may improve the aforementioned issues healthcare faces today (Hillman & Foster, 2011; Sorrentino, 2013). Many organizations require orientation programs, which may consist of both didactic and clinical components. The didactic component occurs in the classroom and focuses on the theoretical aspect of nursing care. The clinical component allows for the hands-on practical nursing experience, is an integral educational process for both students and experienced nurses at various career transitions, and often takes the form of a preceptorship.

Preceptorships facilitate the immersion of new nurses and nursing students into clinical settings by pairing them with preceptors, where preceptors are experienced staff members who support, educate, and aid preceptees by providing clinical orientation into specialized healthcare settings over specific amounts of time (Billay & Yonge, 2004; Craven & Broyles, 1996; Henderson, Fox, & Malko-Nyhan, 2006; Muir et al., 2013). Preceptees may be new graduates, new employees (i.e., experienced nurses transitioning to new positions) or nursing students. Activities occurring during preceptorships include goal setting, competency validation, and feedback on progress (Craven & Broyles, 1996). In sum, the preceptor helps the preceptee assimilate into a nursing environment and culture. Yet, experienced nurses may show a lack of willingness to enter into the preceptor role because they perceive themselves as ill-prepared, unsupported by their peers, and lacking confidence (Farwell, 2009; Sorrentino, 2013; Warren & Denham, 2010).

The limited research focusing on preceptors' and preceptees' perceptions vis-à-vis the preceptor role within a preceptorship have examined preceptees' perceptions of their orientation experiences (Löfmark, Thorkildsen, Råholm, & Karin Natvig, 2012; Patterson, Bayley, Burnell, & Rhoads, 2010), preceptors' perceptions of specific orientation programs (Kaviani & Stillwell, 2000; Muir et al., 2013), and preceptors' perceptions of their educational preparation to serve as a preceptor (Henderson et al., 2006). Systematic reviews have been conducted on the importance and development of the preceptor (Floyd, Kretschmann, & Young, 2005; Gross, 2015; Mann-Salinas et al., 2014; Windey et al., 2015). Mann-Salinas et al. (2014) determined that enough evidence was available to justify the development of a precepting program. A systematic review of interventions for developing preceptors was conducted to identify effective program elements for preceptors but was limited to only quantitative studies omitting any information from the preceptors' or preceptees' perceptions (Windey et al., 2015). Providing support to nurse preceptors was found to positively affect new nursing graduates' retention and turnover rates (Gross, 2015). Floyd et al. (2005), recognized support from staff as providing relief from normal workload duties and administrative support as activities that aid in developing teaching skills. Significant gaps in these literature reviews were found regarding (1) how preceptors are selected, (2) what constitutes preceptor responsibilities, and (3) what motivating factors may increase experienced nurses' willingness to serve as preceptors.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine studies that evaluate preceptorships embedded within an orientation or education program. Selection criteria and responsibilities of the preceptor will be identified to help visualize the preceptorship. We will also review the various orientation programs to identify potential motivators offered to nurse preceptors. To ascertain the efficacy of these designs, preceptors' and preceptees' perceptions of preceptorships are assessed. We end

with recommendations for building effective, evidenced-based preceptorship programs.

Methodology

A search of the PubMed database of the US National Library of Medicine was conducted to find literature evidence. The following MeSH terms were used for this search, ("Nursing"[Mesh]) OR "Nursing Staff, Hospital"[Mesh]) AND ("Mentors"[Mesh]) OR "Preceptorship"[Mesh]) AND "Inservice Training"[Mesh]) AND "Program Evaluation"[Mesh]. This search strategy yielded a total of 115 articles. The CINAHL database was also searched at this time and yielded no additional articles.

Studies were included if the study population was new graduates, new employees, or nursing students and the study evaluated an orientation program containing a preceptorship. Articles were excluded if they were not research studies (n = 9), contained no preceptor data (n = 43), or were not available in English (n = 1). During the full text review, articles were excluded if they were not research studies (n = 1), no preceptor data was identified (n = 19), evaluation was not completed by a participant in the preceptorship (n = 1), the definition of a preceptor used in this study was not followed (n = 17), or the focus was on a preceptor preparation program (n = 5). A total of 19 articles were retained for this study. Following Melnyk and Fineout-Overholt's (2010) guidelines, all 19 studies represent Level IV (i.e., well-designed case-control and cohort studies), revealing that little high-level evidence exists on this topic.

Extracted data from the 19 articles are included in Table 1. The design of the preceptorship which encompasses both selection criteria and preceptor responsibilities was reported. To guide the identification of motivators from the articles, we relied on the work of Staw (1976) who indicated extrinsic motivators are desirable offerings given to someone in exchange for performing a task. Preceptors' and preceptees' perceptions of the preceptorship and overall program orientation represent study outcomes.

Results

Of the 19 studies reviewed, five studies reported the preceptors' perceptions, seven studies reported the preceptees' perceptions, and seven studies reported both preceptors' and preceptees' perceptions. Nine studies reported what constituted preceptor selection criteria. Sixteen studies listed the responsibilities or a description of the preceptorship and 15 studies recorded motivators used for preceptors.

Within the studies identified for this review, eight described preceptees in their studies as new graduates (Almada, Carafoli, Flattery, French, & McNamara, 2004; Bumgarner & Biggerstaff, 2000; Fox, Henderson, & Malko-Nyhan, 2006; Loiseau, Kitchen, & Edgar, 2003; Messmer, Jones, & Taylor, 2004; Nugent, 2008; Proulx & Bourcier, 2008 & Williams, Sims, Burkhead, & Ward, 2002), seven as new employees (Brunt & Kopp, 2007; Cavanaugh & Huse, 2004; Craven & Broyles, 1996; Floyd et al., 2005; Golden, 2008; Morris et al., 2007 & Simpson, Butler, Al-Somali, & Courtney, 2006) and three as nursing students (King et al., 2004; Olson et al., 2001; Starr & Conley, 2006). One study addressed all three preceptee populations but did not contain any comparisons across the various groups (Harper, 2002). Although multiple studies focused on precepting each group, discerning differences across groups was difficult given the variability in approaches employed in all studies. The only noticeable difference across groups had to do with workload sharing, which was only mentioned in studies where new graduates or students were being precepted.

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