

A Recipe for Success: 12 Recommendations from a Seasoned Nurse to Help a New Nurse Succeed

Maureen Dugan, RN, in Med-Surge, works at a busy teaching hospital. She has been training new nurses for many years. Her experience gives her the perfect perspective to give some well-needed advice to help a new nurse succeed and even thrive on the floor.

1. **Ask questions:** despite concern about the value of a question, staff will feel more comfortable when a new nurse asks questions rather than staying quiet. An example of an important question is: "What is the protocol here?" A senior nurse wants a new nurse to know the patient population well and to have a good understanding of current hospital policy. This information will help a nurse's adjustment and build competence.
2. **Role of patient advocate:** don't assume the MD has noticed a change in a patient's lab values or any other aspect of the patient's condition. If you feel a change in a patient's condition is being ignored or downplayed, involve your charge nurse, manager or nursing supervisor. If you are at a teaching hospital, you may need to contact the attending doctor if your concerns are not heard.
3. **Negotiate:** set gentle limits with your patients. Some patients will never understand that you have others to care for. If you can't do something for a particular patient, identify other resources that could be useful. It's best to involve the nursing assistant, volunteers, chaplain, social worker, charge nurse and the manager. As a last resort, contact patient relations, if the patient is upset with the hospital or patient care.
4. **Time management:** as you take report on your patients you will see that no two nurses organize their assignment sheet the same way. Some may prefer to take down all the patient information and then have a separate area that lists everything they need to do hour by hour for all their patients. Some like to make a box next to each procedure to do and check it off as it is completed. See what people are doing and you may take these ideas and combine it into your own system as a starting tool to stay organized.
5. **Performing procedures:** don't hesitate to tell a senior nurse, "I have only done this once (or not at all)." When I taught my first ostomy care to a patient, I gathered all the supplies and then brought in a senior nurse to teach while I observed. If you have a clinical nurse specialist, they are available to teach and assist you, a great way to learn.

6. **Flexibility:** remember, hospitals are predictable chaos. When a nurse demonstrates an ability to be flexible, things usually work out. The added bonus is that other team members will enjoy working with a nurse who embraces flexibility and will be more likely extend themselves from patient assignments to schedule changes.
7. **Professionalism:** show up prepared and ready to contribute to the team. Have a professional appearance, meaning wear clothes that are appropriate in a medical setting. It is wise to be prepared to occasionally stay late, if there is a critical change in your patient's condition. Obviously, this is not something that you should be expected to do repeatedly, but your willingness to attend to your patient's critical needs beyond the end of your shift is an expression of your commitment.
8. **Accountability and consideration:** if your patient's IV goes bad at the change of shift, try to get a new one in place. Accountability means communicating important information about your patient's condition with the next shift: responsible, accountable behavior is often rewarded with mutual cooperation which increases job satisfaction and elevates patient care.
9. **Documentation:** Always double check your charting before you leave. On busy days you may forget to document an assessment, etc. This needs to be a high priority. Since a number of team members may be reviewing a patient's chart, keeping it up to date minimizes the opportunity for mistakes. Always document that an MD was notified about the change of a patient's condition.
10. **Commitment to ongoing self-care:** taking care of yourself with a good diet and regular exercise is essential. It is best to bring healthy food to work; unfortunately, there is a lot of tempting junk food in the break room, therefore, bringing nutritious food and snacks are an important part of supporting yourself.
11. **Confident stance:** while it may feel like a challenge to project confidence when you are feeling fearful or overwhelmed, staying calm, paying attention and asking questions will help you stay grounded and project confidence; it is also a message to your patients and team members that you have the maturity and stamina to be a nurse in a hectic environment.
12. **Replenishment:** use your time off to replenish your spirit and energy. Think of the things you can do to revive your spirit. Try not to use your precious time off to obsess or beat yourself up for what did go well on a shift. Using your time to refuel is a great way to go back to work refreshed and ready to go.

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