

A Dedicated Nurse Discusses his Approach to Precepting New Nurses

Bill Freedman is an experienced, dedicated nurse who works on a renal unit in a hospital in Northern California. Bill loves to precept new nurses on his unit. His steadfast commitment to teach new nurses to master their clinical skills and effectively manage their workload has given him the well-deserved reputation, as the nurse other nurses love to learn from.

SFN: You have taken on the task of training new nurses; what made you decide to take on that role?

BF: Teaching interests me; I like watching new nurses grow and learn and watch what I do. I like to see a new fresh mind—like a dry sponge—willing to absorb and learn new information. New nurses don't have old, bad habits—no baggage from before.

SFN: How would you describe your approach to training new nurses to manage their workload effectively? What type of advice and tips do you offer them?

BF: I have great rapport with new nurses. I try to lead by example. The first day and maybe the second day, a new nurse shadows me. During this process, I want to know what the complete picture is on a patient: treatment and a care plan; I stress the importance of charting and progress notes. I always ask, "Is there anything missing?" A nurse's assessment helps me to find out if all bases are being covered.

I developed tools to help nurses organize their shift; they watch everything I do: listen and ask questions; I show them my method; they take all my patients from the beginning and follow through to the completion of each patient's care; this gives them a complete picture of patient care. I see in 3-4 days that they begin to get it, because they are able to begin to see the 'big' picture. I want them right there with me—beside me, and then to get sick of me! I want them to feel competent, so I can start pulling away. I then become a resource.

SFN: What is the most rewarding aspect of training new nurses?

BF: I like to watch new nurses grow, make progress and understand their nursing role; it is great when I can stand back and become a resource.

SFN: What is the greatest obstacle for you when training new nurses?

BF: There are a number of obstacles: not showing up for training, lateness and not being prepared for the shift (with their toolkit). I request the nurses I precept to arrive at the training prepared with a toolkit: stethoscope, scissors, pen and pencils.

SFN: In order for you to be successful at what you do, what type of support do you receive?

BF: A pay increase to support the work I do, (training new nurses). I am willing to give, and I want to receive as well.

SFN: When managing their workload, where do most new nurses get stuck? Why?

BF: There can be too much on their plate; they get stuck when they aren't organized and, they can't to see the whole picture-when they don't focus on all they have to do. And, when they are overwhelmed, they need to reflect, relax, take a break, get their mind together and then respond.

SFN: Can you identify the type of ongoing support that is most valuable to the nurses you train?

BF: Know your resources: pharmacists, housekeepers, storerooms, clinical floats, IV starter, etc; they need to know the doctors and make friends with them. The most important thing is to be able to establish and maintain rapport, so when they need to call someone, they get results. Also, they need to know their colleagues, both their strengths and weaknesses.

SFN: What type of advice can you offer nurses that would help them have an easier time acclimating to their role and responsibilities as a team member?

BF: Build rapport with staff members. Be willing to give to team members as well as receive from them.

SFN: Finally, the issue of retention of new nurses is of great concern in the medical community; what advice do you have for preceptors and managers to support new nurses in order to retain them?

BF: First, new nurses need to make sure they work in the area they where they want to work. Also, it is best when managers have people skills; they need to be able to approach each and every nurse according to that nurse's style and personality. Preceptors need to be given support and enough time to spend with a new nurse to ensure they are competent to stand on their own two feet.

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