

Mistakes: Turn Them Into Learning Opportunities!!

New nurses make mistakes; it is part of the learning process. Mistakes come in all shapes and sizes; and, of course, it is best to avoid making mistakes that can do harm to a patient. The most important thing a new nurse can do is to allow each mistake to become an opportunity for learning, so you don't make the same mistake twice!

1. Learning lab: one of the benefits of being a nurse is that it provides you with a lifetime of learning—including learning from your own mistakes. As you take on new tasks and the complexity of your job increases, mistakes will naturally be a part of moving forward.

2. Take responsibility, admit when you've made a mistake: when you make a mistake, it is best to admit that you made the mistake and take responsibility for it. I am not recommending that you spend a lot of time feeling badly about yourself, but I do recommend that you admit your mistake with the follow-up question, "What can I learn from this mistake, and how can I avoid making the same mistake again?" Taking this approach will help you gain the admiration of your colleagues and demonstrate that you have the maturity to thrive in a learning environment.

3. Admit to yourself that mistakes are part of the learning process: if your goal is to not make any mistakes, you may lapse into a state of 'paralysis'—unable to perform your tasks independently. Seeking perfection is a way to inject a high dose of misery into your career early on, something that will not serve you or your patients well.

4. Forgive yourself: avoid self flagellation, which is a fancy way of saying, "don't be hard too hard on yourself"; if you are preoccupied with how badly you feel after making a mistake, it can affect your ability to trust yourself to make decisions regarding the care of your patients in the future.

5. Use your critical thinking skills: after you've made a mistake, spend some time thinking about what went wrong and why it went wrong; your reflection should involve looking at the context of the situation, including what you could have done differently and, most importantly, what you will do in the future if a similar situation arises.

6. Discuss mistakes with fellow team members: discuss your mistake with a more experienced nurse you trust. A supportive team member can share anecdotes with you from their early experience starting out as a nurse. Sharing of stories and anecdotes can help normalize the whole notion of making mistakes as part of becoming a nurse; remember, every team member has made their share of mistakes.

7. Making the same mistake repeatedly: if you find yourself making the same mistake repeatedly, then it is your task to understand why that is happening. In exploring the possible origins of a recurrent mistake, first see if it is related to an unresolved internal issue that could be interfering with your competency or explore if the mistake is related to an external issue, such as short-staffing or an unsupportive team environment, where it doesn't feel safe to ask questions. Once you've

determined the origins of your mistake, decide how you wish to respond. This is the time to get the help you need and deserve, such as obtaining counseling if your mistake is related to an intrapersonal, unresolved issue; if this issue is related to an external problem, discuss the problem with your manager; these actions can help interrupt a potentially harmful pattern.

Cultivating an attitude that links mistakes as opportunities for growth helps a new nurse feel more relaxed and eager to learn. And, when mistakes are an opportunity for learning, they are less likely to become recurrent problems.

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