2. The Preceptor Role

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The Preceptor: Crucial in Preparing Advanced Practice Nurses

The preceptor guides the student into the real world of advanced practice and allows the student to try new skills, gain confidence, and validation. “The nurturing of students is a developmentally appropriate professional responsibility of mature clinicians, a means to insure and influence the future of the [advanced practice nursing] movement well into the next century, and a way to further cement one’s identity as an [advanced practice nurse].” (Hayes, 1994, page 62.)

As a preceptor, you will teach, coach, and role model. You will find characteristics and skills of effective preceptors in Section 4: Assessing, presented in a self-assessment format. No doubt, you have displayed many of these qualities, and therefore the faculty invited you to participate as a preceptor.

It is hard to imagine how students could successfully prepare for roles in advanced practice without the guidance of preceptors. The faculty values your services as a preceptor and welcomes your recommendations for making the preceptor role more effective and satisfying.
The Preceptor's Relationship with Students and with Faculty

When you assume the preceptor role, you add two more relationships to the interdisciplinary constellation of relationships in which you participate. As in all relationships, success is based in part on a good balance of asking for what you need and sharing your perspective, expertise and, perceptions. Help the student learn to ask and share with you: Ask for help when needed; Ask for a different approach; Ask for feedback. And, share with you: Share previous experience; Share perceptions of the practice environment; Share feedback about your precepting techniques.

Ask and share with both the student and the faculty member. Encourage the faculty member to ask and share with you. The faculty will plan regular visits with you. Plan an item or two to ask and share during each visit. Some preceptors find e-mail to be an effective means of communicating with the faculty member.

The faculty member will assume responsibility for assuring that the student has met the licensure, insurance, and health screening requirements of the school. Verify that these requirements also satisfy the requirements of your agency. Assure that you know any policies related to work-related injuries or other situations in which students might be exceptions to usual employee policies.

University Resources

Explore university resources with the faculty member. On-line faculty resources are available. You may choose to meet with the faculty member either by telephone or in person.

The College of Nursing and Allied Health faculty as a group possess an impressive array of expertise in various areas that might be useful to your agency: administration, outcome measurement, quality improvement, various clinical specialties, and other areas of expertise. It may be possible to negotiate for some consultation services.

The university is a vibrant and dynamic environment in which new developments are occurring daily. As an active part of the university community, you can gain access to many benefits.
Some issues arise in precepting and defy easy answers. These issues recur in different forms with different students and different practice situations. When you face such issues, consult with the faculty member for advice about some of the approaches that have proven effective in the past.

**Time constraint**

Time management becomes a problem when adding precepting responsibilities to your responsibilities in a busy practice. What can you do differently, later, not at all, or delegate in order to make time for precepting? Another time factor is the limitation of the hours and weeks of the student's scheduled experience. Maximizing the time with realistic expectations requires planning and continuing assessment of progress.

**Patient's acceptance of the student provider**

Express and affirm your confidence in the student's competence, but respect the patient's wishes. Some patients are very receptive to students and feel even better attended when "double-teamed" by a student with expert practitioner supervision.

**Balancing the multiple, and sometimes competing, expectations of patients, agency, student, faculty, and own professional and personal needs**

Maintaining an acceptable balance requires keeping current with all parties and negotiating.

**Recognition**

Faculty is concerned about expressing appreciation and reaffirming the great value of preceptors. Unfortunately, commensurate financial rewards are simply not available in the academic environment. The faculty will entertain your suggestions about meaningful, feasible rewards for your valued precepting services.
Factors Affecting the Student-Preceptor Relationship

(Hayes & Harrell, 1994, page 223)

**STUDENT ISSUES**
- Problems with authority figures
- Pattern of learning
- Stage of professional development
- Power and control held too tightly by preceptor
- Attitude, interest, initiative, ability to make needs known
- Student or mentor inflexibility
- Student-preceptor match
- Being treated as an outsider or a burden
- Long distances to travel
- Lack of preparation
- Inability to take criticism
- Inability to link theory with practice
- Anxiety

**PRECEPTOR ISSUES**
- Participation versus observation - not letting go
- Attitude of preceptor toward the student and the course
- Teaching ability, competence, communication skills
- Lack of experiences for the student
- Environmental or administrative issues; lack of support or time for precepting role; lack of faculty support
- Conflicts around expectations for the student; degree of independence and responsibility for stage of development
- Loss of control of patients
- Conflict between preceptor and faculty
- The evaluation process
- Preceptors forget what it is like to be a student