

## Mentoring Nurses Toward Success

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Perhaps you are a newly graduated nurse. Maybe you're an experienced nurse assuming a new position. Or perhaps you're looking for a little guidance as you investigate new nursing roles. What all of these situations have in common is a need to learn the ropes of a new position. One effective avenue is mentoring.

Jill is a new RN who had been seeking a nursing job in her home state. With today's wilting economy, she was unable to find a suitable position, so she ventured into a new territory and accepted a position in her chosen specialty, medical-surgical nursing. She felt fortunate to have found a position at a medical center about 200 miles from her family.

Jill is encountering many new things at once: a new home, new city, new hospital, and new job. Sounds overwhelming, doesn't it?

One of the reasons Jill selected the medical-surgical unit at her new hospital is because her interview with the nurse manager and the unit staff went so well. She found them to be welcoming, caring, friendly, professional, and patient-centered. Also high on her list of positives about the job was the unit's mentoring program. Jill had the opportunity to interview with a mentor and mentee in the program, and it was this interview that sealed the deal for her decision to accept the position.

### So what exactly is mentoring?

Mentoring is a reciprocal and collaborative learning relationship between two individuals with mutual goals and shared accountability for the success of the relationship. The mentor is the guide, expert, and role model who helps develop a new or less experienced mentee.

mentee is paired with an experienced nurse to learn a new position and develop in the role.

Mentoring is more than orientation or preceptorship, which may last a few weeks or through a three-month probationary period. The duration isn't cast in stone; it is an ongoing relationship that will last as

position as the chairperson of a shared governance council. Some nurses may also become a mentor themselves one day, using their knowledge, wisdom, and understanding to provide meaningful learning experiences for a mentee.

Mentoring is a partnership between the mentor as a teacher



In many instances, mentoring is a spontaneous relationship that develops between two people. However, mentoring can also be successful when the mentor and mentee are paired or matched intentionally. This is often the case in health care facilities when a mentee transitions into a new role. The

long as the mentor and mentee find meaning and value in it.

A mentoring relationship can occur at any phase of an individual's career, whether a new graduate, an experienced nurse assuming a nurse manager or clinical nurse specialist position, or an established clinician taking on a leadership

and the mentee as a student. As adult learners, mentees are responsible for their own learning and behaviors. As teachers, mentors act as guides or facilitators of learning.

Each of us has numerous opportunities throughout our lives to be new at something, and it isn't always a pleas-

## Need-to-Know Advice for Mentors and Mentees

### Tips for Mentors

- Exhibit exemplary role model behavior.
- Recognize and encourage potential.
- Monitor your mentee's progress and provide helpful feedback.
- Introduce your mentee to coworkers, physicians, and other significant individuals.
- Offer guidance in the customs/culture of your organization.
- Build a relationship of trust.
- Discuss the confidential basis of the relationship.
- Live up to promises and commitments.
- Publicly praise your mentee's accomplishments and abilities.
- Provide support in times of personal crises or problems.
- Assist in making decisions through listening, support, and feedback. Ask "why?"
- Share appropriate life experiences to personalize and enrich the mentoring experience.
- Encourage your mentee to take risks and learn from mistakes.
- Agree to a no-fault termination of the relationship if it isn't working or when the time is right.

### Tips for Mentees

- Assume responsibility for your own learning and growth.
- Seek challenging assignments and responsibilities.
- Be receptive to and ask for feedback. Also, give constructive feedback to your mentor.
- Live up to promises and commitments.
- Articulate your professional/learning needs to your mentor.
- Ask questions. Share concerns.
- Be prepared for meetings with your mentor.
- Discuss your long-range career planning with your mentor.
- Ask for advice/feedback on handling difficult situations and behaviors.
- Discuss clinical decisions that are made.
- Progressively increase the independence in your role.
- Honor the confidentiality of the relationship.
- Agree to a no-fault termination of the relationship if it isn't working or when the time is right.

ant experience. There is fear of the unknown, uncertain confidence, fear of making a mistake, and just the uncomfortable feeling of not being in control. We've all been there and will be there again at some point. In the role of a mentor, it is very helpful to remember what it was like being new to a position or task. It helps to get in the frame of reference of the mentee.

### Novice to expert continuum

Patricia Benner, Ph.D., R.N., in her book *From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice*, says learning new skills requires a progression through stages or levels. These levels are novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert.

When nurses take on new and unfamiliar roles, they often begin at the novice stage.

Novices use rules and facts to guide their actions. They adhere to these rules without consideration for the context of the situation. It is difficult for a novice to put all of the parts together and see the whole picture. They are concerned with the tasks at hand and often cannot do more than one thing at a time.

Most novices want to feel and be seen as competent immediately upon taking on a new role. It is uncomfortable knowing one does not have a firm grasp of the position. Mentors and mentees must remember that learning new skills is a process that takes time. Both individuals must be patient during this formative time and realize what's occurring is normal.

With time and experience, novice nurses continue to experience the real world and

progress to the advanced beginner and higher levels of the continuum. Mentors can continue to play a significant role in the mentees' progression.

### Mentees

Mentees will become successful in their roles more quickly when they listen actively to what is going on and are willing to soak up as much learning as possible. Mentors are a rich source of knowledge—they've been there, done that, and learned the critical pieces to perform successfully. Thus, mentees can gain a tremendous amount from an effective mentoring relationship.

Successful mentoring relationships are built upon trust, openness to self-disclosure, affirmation, and willingness and skill in giving and receiving feedback. Mentoring involves a significant expenditure of

time and energy on the part of the mentor and especially the mentee. Living up to promises and commitments to each other is extremely important to the relationship.

Mentees learn to achieve a balance between their own independence and reliance on the mentor. Over time, the independence will most likely dominate and the relationship will change.

After experiencing an effective mentoring relationship, mentees often feel refueled and inspired to make a difference in their practice. Other benefits of mentoring for the mentee include:

- Increased self-confidence
- Enhanced leadership skills
- Accelerated acclimation to the culture of the unit/facility
- Advancement opportunities
- Enhanced communication skills, especially with the interdisciplinary team

- Reduced stress
- Improved networking ability
- Political savvy
- Legal and ethical insight

### Mentors

Time seems to be the most precious commodity these days. Potential mentors may feel they don't have the time to spend on a mentoring relationship, especially when they have a full workload themselves. However, the time invested in mentoring a nurse transitioning to a new role is time well spent for the mentor and mentee, as well as the unit and facility. It is a huge contribution to advancing the future of nursing.

Mentors help mentees learn the ropes, their role, the political environment, and the culture of the unit or organization in a formal—yet unstructured—way. They create a warm and accepting environment that allows mentees to control the relationship, while at the same time allowing mentees to be themselves and voice relevant needs and concerns. Mentors are personable, approachable, reasonable, and competent individuals committed to helping mentees achieve the success of which they are capable.

Effective mentors are confident enough in their own knowledge, skills, and successes that they do not perceive mentees or their accomplishments as threatening. They are committed to seeking situations that will benefit the mentees' development.

Mentors provide their mentees with insights that would otherwise have been gained only through trial and error. They ask a lot of questions—especially “Why?”—which

encourages mentees to stop and reflect on situations and potential alternatives. Mentors are good at linking different bits and pieces of their mentees' lives, such as work and home, thoughts and feelings, successes and failures. They try to look at the bigger picture and the future. Mentors help their mentees grow in their critical-thinking skills and progress along the novice to expert continuum.

### Potential problems with mentoring

Not every relationship is successful. This can be true of a mentoring relationship as well. Sometimes the interpersonal dynamics or the match between mentor and mentee just doesn't work. One partner might grow faster than the other or in a different direction, and a strain on the relationship may occur.

One common problem is the lack of follow-up and commitment to sustain the relationship. Mentors might overburden the mentee with work and responsibilities, or vice versa. Mentees may become a clone of the mentor and lose their individuality. They may also become too dependent on their mentors. An unfavorable incident may occur in which the mentor or mentee feels let down or betrayed. Jealousy and personal or ethical disagreements can also strain the relationship.

There is also the case of toxic mentors who are detrimental to the success of their mentees. Toxic mentors may be unavailable or inaccessible to mentees or may throw the mentees to the wolves to either sink or swim. Toxic mentors may also block the mentees'

progress or criticize them in various non-constructive ways.

Both mentors and mentees can learn from the problems others have encountered in the mentoring relationship. If signs of these problems begin to develop, both individuals have a responsibility to confront the situation and actively plan a resolution or dissolution.

Prior to entering into a mentoring relationship, both parties should agree to a no-fault separation if one or both individuals realize the relationship is not working.

### Mentoring for professional growth

Mentoring has proven to be a successful way of facilitating the professional growth and development of recently graduated nurses and other nurses transitioning to a new role.

The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSIN) has long recognized the value of mentoring for nurses in the acute care setting. AMSIN has recently evolved its long-standing Nurses Nurturing Nurses (N3) mentoring program into a self-directed format that provides the tools for designing a successful mentoring program of your own, whether you are a mentor, mentee, or a mentoring program coordinator.

The AMSIN Mentoring Program is provided on a complimentary basis on the AMSIN website, [www.amsn.org/mentoring](http://www.amsn.org/mentoring). The program contains a Mentor Guide, Mentee Guide, Site Coordinator Guide, and an “Introduction to Mentoring” article. You may use and customize the information and tools provided in any manner you deem appropriate for your facility or yourself. **MN**

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## How to Find Mentoring Opportunities

There's an abundance of websites that provide more information on nursing mentorship programs. Visit the websites below to start your journey toward mentorship, or ask your facility's head nurse or other human resources personnel about formal mentoring arrangements available.

- The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses provides guides and information for mentorship programs: [www.amsn.org/mentoring](http://www.amsn.org/mentoring).
- MinorityNurse.com has several articles regarding mentoring, like the one here: <http://bit.ly/MNMentoring>.
- For information on becoming a mentor or mentee, visit the Mentorship Opportunities page on [www.newcareersinursing.org](http://www.newcareersinursing.org).
- A selection of articles on mentoring can be found at [www.nursezone.com](http://www.nursezone.com) and [www.nursetogether.com](http://www.nursetogether.com).