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Supporting novice nurses

A discussion on how nurse leaders are approaching nurse recruitment, onboarding, orientation and support



Most novice nurses don't feel ready for practice. To address this challenge, many nurse leaders are nurturing an encouraging culture that helps new nurses to feel welcomed, valued, and supported throughout their entire nursing career journeys.

An environment that supports these nurses hinges on helping them gain confidence in their skills, offering resources to fuel their professional growth, and providing avenues for coaching and conversations about their daily work and future aspirations. A well-rounded approach can positively impact the trajectory of novice nurses' careers.

Nurse leaders shared their challenges, experiences, and strategies for recruiting, engaging, and retaining novice nurses during Elsevier's virtual roundtable, "Beat the Burnout: How to Support & Retain Novice Nurses and their Educators". Included among the concerns they are experiencing:

- Ongoing staff shortages and constant recruitment due to low retention
- New nurses' limited understanding of job responsibilities and career opportunities
- Lack of feedback and overall dissatisfaction among new nurses

63%

of new grad nurses say they don't feel ready for clinical practice.¹



Participants



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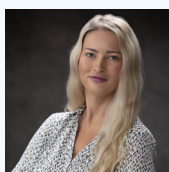
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Challenges in recruitment and retention

Inadequate onboarding and orientation contribute to 58% of patient care errors – along with rising risk of nurse burnout and turnover.² So, it's not surprising that 17% of newly licensed RNs leave their job within the first year.³

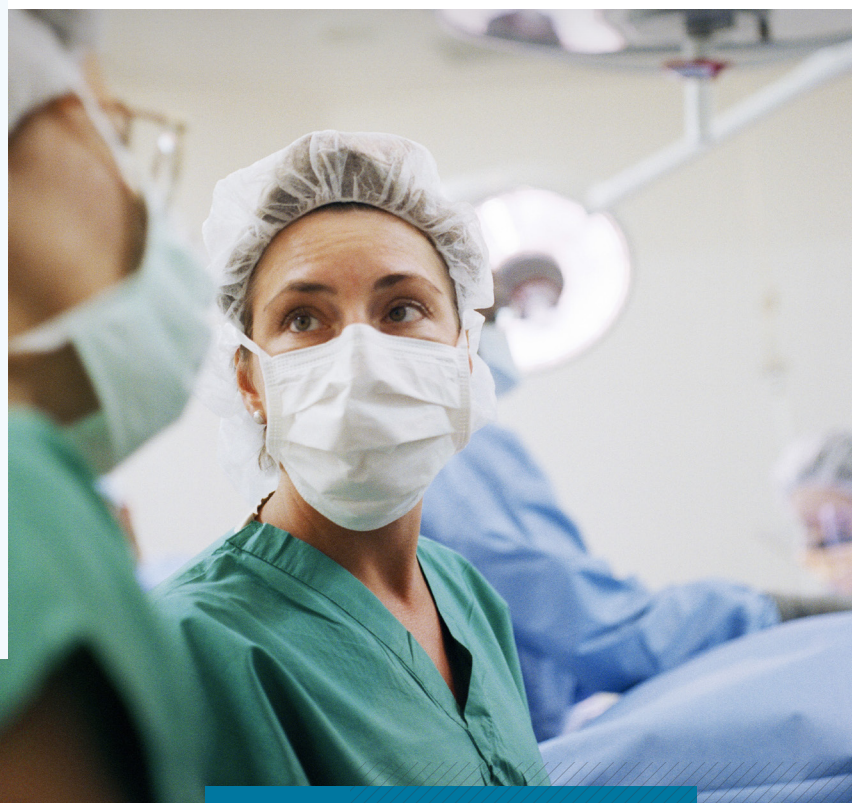
To help combat high turnover, healthcare organizations turn to preceptors who can play a key role in retention, providing invaluable teaching and learning experiences, while modeling optimal patient care. Yet 85%⁴ of preceptors have not been formally trained for this crucial role – for which they need to hone their teaching abilities, strengthen communication, and enhance their evaluation skills. In addition to the need for training, they face expanding workloads that add to their daily pressure.

At the same time, novice nurses may not feel part of the team as they may have limited understanding of their job responsibilities and what opportunities for advancement exist or what their career path may look like. Many also do not receive regular feedback from leadership on their performance.



“Encourage leaders to do outreach to help bring people in, through speaking engagements, faculty positions, and other opportunities. Convey the message, ‘You can do your whole career here. Where do you want to be?’”

Meghan Hirth, RN, MSN



3 strategies to strengthen novice nurse recruitment and retention



- 1. Develop your own pipeline.** Innovative organizations are looking at ways to create their own pipelines to attract and engage new and experienced nurses – such as collaborating with local nursing schools on speaking opportunities to tout what it's like working for your organization. Building a strong pipeline could also entail offering a structured residency program — supplementing in-person or virtual courses with practical experience within the hospital — to support nurses' clinical readiness and give them a clear picture of working in an acute care setting. Connecting with local CNA-training programs in high schools or other technical schools can provide another avenue for future recruits, helping students understand how your organization can help them progress their careers from phlebotomist to nursing, for example, with employer-sponsored tuition-support along the way, if your organization offers it.



- 2. Create a sense of belonging.** Novice nurses need leadership support and resources to stay, grow, and excel. Most importantly, they need to feel each day that they are seen, heard, and valued in a safe and inclusive work environment. There are many ways to foster belonging. Key among them is demonstrating that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a core organizational value. Finding out why nurses choose to enter the profession and finding ways to bring their individual creative, organizational and other skills and talents to the organization can also help new nurses feel valued.



- 3. Develop nurse educators.** Preceptors and nurse educators require ongoing training to ensure they maintain clinical best practices. It's important to prepare them to be side-by-side with novice nurses to teach evidence-based care from the beginning. Beyond clinical practice considerations, educators also need their own support and resources to be highly effective teachers, communicators, and coaches. Prepared nurse educators are equipped to develop new nurses for their roles, which ultimately increases their confidence, builds stronger teams, and fortifies your ability to retain staff.



“New nurses are really striving to feel they belong, especially within the first 14 days, so they feel they made the right choice. We send out pre-interview emails and information about the unit, to get people excited about coming to us. And then I meet with them on week two day one to go through introductions, ask them their goals, and help them see a pathway with us.”

Jamie Corral, MS, RN, NE-BC

Challenges around job responsibilities and opportunities



With limited exposure to real-world clinical scenarios pre-licensure, today's novice nurses are transitioning to practice feeling isolated, unsure, and overwhelmed. They are entering a demanding environment, with more complex patient needs and larger patient-to-nurse ratios than ever before.⁵

Additionally, they may not fully understand the job responsibilities or what their career paths could look like over time.

New nurses need support, training and guidance from day one on the job to understand what is expected of them for optimal patient care and safety. And when they have the benefit of working alongside experienced nurses across key roles and specialties, they can visualize rewarding opportunities to progress in the short-term and over the course of their careers.



“Sometimes what you learn in a book is different in the real world. We supplement on-unit training with a simulation lab and go over key missing skill sets. This helps (novice nurses) navigate the transition from coursework to professional work. We also provide dedicated education units, where we can help support people in clinical and practicums in one site.”

Jessica Reid, MBA, BSN, RN, NE-BC, CCRN-K, PCCN-K

3 ways to help novice nurses understand their job responsibilities and growth opportunities



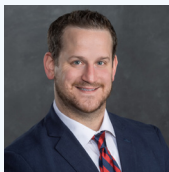
1. **Put learning first.** While learning starts with a robust orientation built on a foundation of evidence-based practice, it should also prioritize professional skills development such as communication, teamwork, empathy, and problem-solving. This can give new nurses a baseline to begin their integration into the professional workforce while providing important patient-facing skills.



2. **Provide paths to career growth.** Starting at recruitment, address how your learning and development programs map to fulfilling career paths for nurses at every level. When new nurses arrive, managers should work with them to create a professional development plan – including supportive resources and tools — and revisit this plan regularly to track progress and adjust goals. The earlier and more frequently you discuss career development, the better.

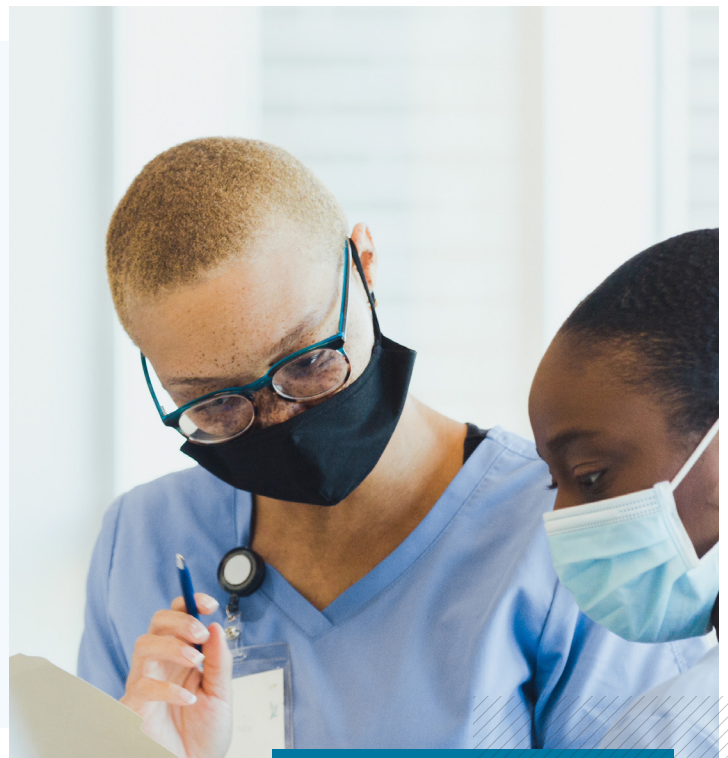


3. **Help nurses explore possibilities.** Provide opportunities for nurses to be exposed to different specialties so they can expand their knowledge while exploring their interests and passions within the care setting. If a nurse struggles in one unit or specialty area, nurse leaders should be prepared to help them find a new home within the organization to benefit the individual, teams, patients, and the organization.



“We offer a 12-month nurse residency program for all new grads. They’re placed in a cohort with similar specialty areas and complete a project. Doing so lets them dive into division-specific topics while getting a global perspective.”

Mark Smallacombe, MSN, PMHRN

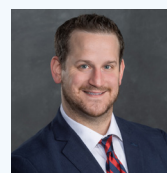


Challenges in feedback and communication for new nurses

The experiences new nurses gather within their initial assignments provide the foundation for continued growth and success. Importantly, feedback and communication can make the difference between whether a novice nurse stays and grows within their role, or quickly leaves the organization – or even the profession.

Still, for nurses to participate in ongoing communication, they need to believe they are safe, they are heard, and they will be taken seriously.

Creating an environment where 1:1 and team discussions are actively encouraged among nurses, nurse leadership, and other disciplines is important for overall job satisfaction. Conversations should remain positive and non-punitive — even when difficult — to develop trust, openness, and respectful relationships throughout all levels of the organization.⁶



“Direct access to leadership in a non-punitive environment where novice nurses can say what they need to say is huge. When you’re new, you already have fears you’ll make a mistake. We want them to see mistakes as learning opportunities.”

Mark Smallacombe, MSN, PMHRN



3 ways to strengthen communication and improve satisfaction



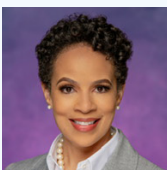
- 1. Provide regular check-ins with new nurses.** Weekly, in-person check-ins with new nurses can give much needed support in the early days of their employment and help them understand what's expected of them. Within these meetings, nurse managers can both ask for and share feedback on what's working and what's not, making sure the nurse knows that their manager is there to support them. Feedback can be used to shift the mindset to 'what can we do better' rather than as punitive action, helping the novice nurse feel more positive and see challenges as learning opportunities. Meetings can switch to monthly over time and can be paired with 30, 60, and 90 day in-person meetings with nurse leaders. Regardless of frequency, these meetings should always focus on coaching and support.



- 2. Instill communication in your organization's culture.** A supportive environment that prioritizes communication can help improve nurse engagement and foster a sense of community while ensuring accountability. Additionally, nurse leaders can take advantage of opportunities to be relatable and supportive of their teams and show up as authentic leaders by outwardly communicating in a variety of settings. From open town halls with residents, to peer support groups for new graduate nurses, surrounding novice nurses with opportunities to have their voices heard is the best way to help them build confidence and assure them that they're an important part of the organization.



- 3. Make technology work for you.** Today's novice nurses are tech-savvy and often prefer to communicate digitally. It's important to meet them where they are, including on their mobile devices. Providing multiple avenues for novice nurses to share their input and connect with leadership and one another can help, such as mobile communication apps, instant message groups, and social media pages. Conducting informal feedback polls is another good way to gather regular input from your teams.



“It's important to model the behaviors you want to see. That includes fostering communication and the sense of community and belonging. And we can't always do things the way we've always done them. It can help to provide training for more seasoned team members so they can learn how to work with different learning styles and generations.”

Rhonda Smith, DNP, MS, RN

Solutions to support your nurses

Elsevier's clinical nursing solutions can help build your nurses' confidence and skills to support them at each stage in their career journeys.

- **Transition to Practice** and **Shadow Health** help to ensure novice nurses are successful from the start by offering immersive virtual learning to develop and assess clinical reasoning and professional skills.
- **Clinical eLearning** courses enhance nurses' professional skills during orientation and residency along with ongoing professional development and practice improvement.
- **Clinical Skills** promotes consistent, high-quality care by combining evidence-based skills and procedures at the point of care with continuing education and competency management.
- **ClinicalKey** helps clinicians expand their knowledge and support optimal treatment decisions by answering complex questions based on current evidence.

For additional information on these solutions or to request a demo, visit: elsevier.com/health/nurse

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