5 Best Practices for Retaining Novice Nurse Talent through Your Residency Program

INTRODUCTION

Nurse leaders are facing more challenges than ever before. With a 19.5% average nurse turnover rate,[1] healthcare organizations continue to grapple with a growing experience-complexity gap and nursing shortage. On top of this, new nurses have an accelerated time to practice, causing them to feel stressed, apprehensive, and often overwhelmed. It's no surprise that the average new graduate nurse turnover rate is even higher at 35%,[2] or that the nursing workforce has seen the largest drop in over four decades.[3]

Current nursing challenges

+ **Accelerated time to practice**

+ **Growing experience-complexity gap**

+ **High nurse graduate turnover**

+ **Mounting nursing shortage**

"Every day, I talk to nurse leaders about how many nurses are leaving to travel, or they're unhappy and just leaving the bedside," said Kandi Helminiak, RN, BSN, Clinical Nurse Executive at Elsevier, during an American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL) conference session, "Retaining Nursing Talent Through an Innovative Systemwide Residency Program."

STRENGTHENING NURSING SKILLS IN A SAFE SPACE

What are attainable measures to address these top nursing challenges? Helminiak said it starts with:

+ **Establishing a solid educational foundation**

+ **Providing professional development opportunities**

+ **Helping nurses to feel like valued members of the care team**

This can be achieved by implementing a standardized, evidence-based nurse residency program. A well-designed program will help novice nurses improve competency, build confidence, and increase satisfaction – which ultimately can help curb turnover – and ensure each nurse throughout your health system or hospital can provide the same level of care to each patient.

During the critical transition from nursing school to immersion in practice, nurses need a safe space to strengthen their skills and feel supported in their well-being. Preceptors also play a vital role during this transition. An engaged preceptor provides welcoming mentorship and serves as an expert and resource for nurse residents. In fact, 64% of nurses reported that their clinical experience improved due to their preceptor.[4]
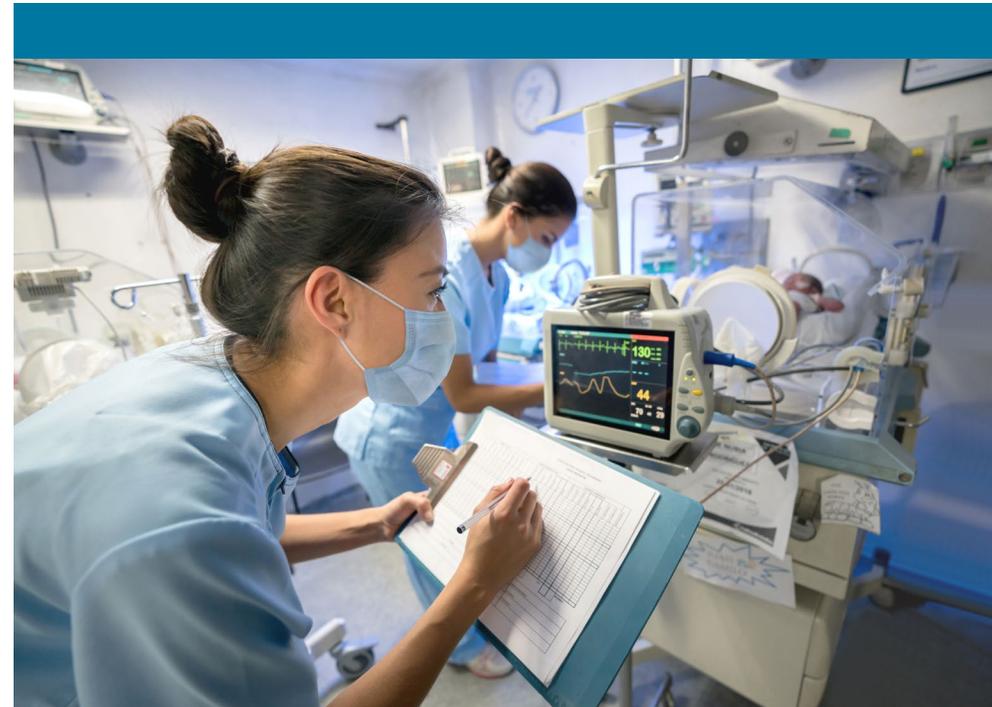
CREATING A BEST PRACTICE RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Combat today's challenges to see real change and ongoing progress with well-crafted solutions that are additive to your workplace culture. Creating a residency program that is both innovative and structured to empower clinical success involves five best practices:

1. **Setting measurable goals**

2. **Evaluating learning solutions**

3. **Developing a structured curriculum**

4. **Integrating technology**

5. **Validating program impact and value**
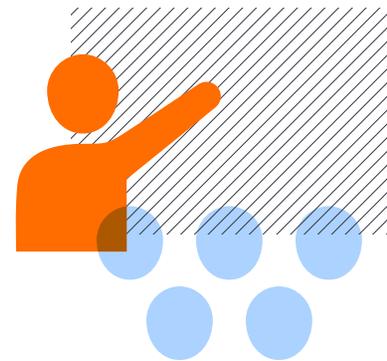
Best Practice 1: Setting measurable goals

Your residency program goals will differ based on your organization's size, geography, mission, and other objectives. The goals of the program should be realistic, measurable, and authentic to the workplace environment, climate, and culture. Consider what makes your organization unique and weave these elements into the foundation of your program.

Best Practice 2: Evaluating learning solutions

Learning solutions should be evidence-based and standardized across your organization to enable consistent and optimal patient care. Innovation is a key factor that opens the door to stronger novice nurse engagement, collaboration, and

cultural integration. Today's dynamic virtual modalities such as role-playing scenarios through gaming, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and high-fidelity simulation offer a rewarding personalized learning experience for each learner.

Best Practice 3: Developing a structured curriculum

Content should fulfill core competencies aligned with your organization's vision, mission, and values. Curriculum should include evidence-based learning to provide your nurses with a strong foundation in patient experience, quality, safety, and culture:

+ **Clinical and professional practice competencies.** Learning solutions should align with trusted associations such as ANA, AACN, ENA, and ASPAN, and cover clinical competencies across healthcare settings (e.g., medical-surgical, critical care, emergency, perioperative, ambulatory). They also can be based on QSEN quality and safety education for nurses, IHI, regulatory and accreditation requirements, board of nursing requirements, and National Patient Safety Goals.

    A professional practice curriculum helps new nurses strengthen communication, collaboration, evidence-based practice, ethics, leadership, critical decision making, delegation, time management, and workplace wellness.

+ **Leadership.** Coursework aligned to ANA, AONL, ANPD, and AACN aims to strengthen competencies, encourage growth, and provide a foundational knowledge for future leaders, including preceptors and front-line nurse managers.
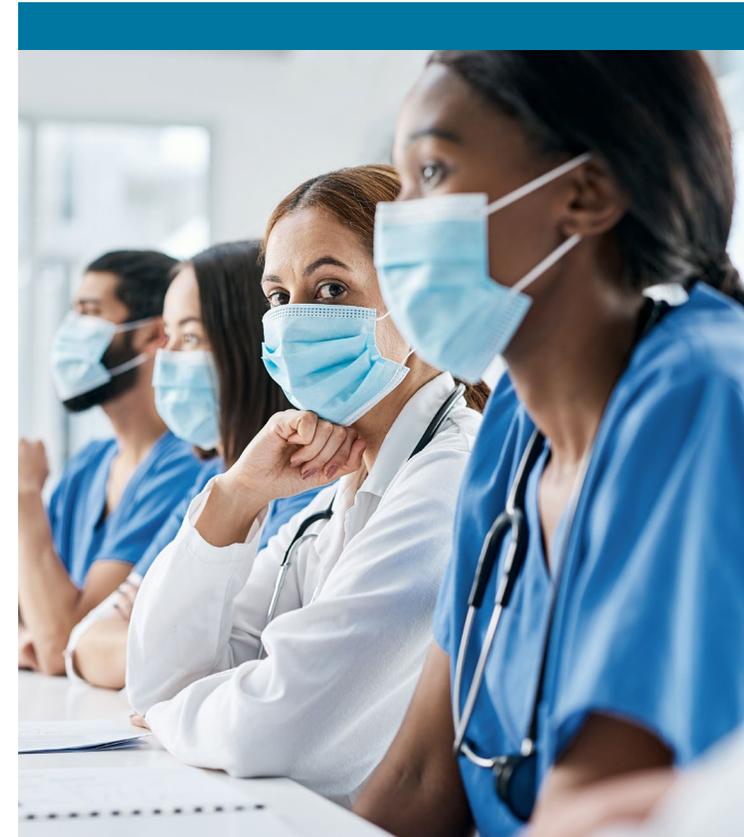
Best Practice 4: Integrating technology

Integrating technology into your current program, such as through virtual learning, can help to get your new graduate nurses practice-ready more efficiently. Simulation tools enabling interactions with realistic, diverse virtual patients allow nurses to gain real-world experience in a safe setting.

"If every new graduate nurse had access to practice realistic care scenarios in a safe, simulated environment, it would greatly improve their confidence, competence, and ability to provide quality care." said Helminiak. "There are many simulations that help normalize a resident's behavior on what they should do based on evidence-based practice."

Nurse leaders benefit from technology-based reporting tools to assess competency and progress, coupled with communication tools to understand how novice nurses are feeling, to provide tailored guidance and support where and when it's needed most.

Another way that some health systems are integrating technology into residency programs, is to now offer experienced virtual preceptors, who operate from virtual care sites or command centers. This is an innovative approach to provide coaching and skills to help support preceptors and new nurses at the beside from a telemedicine cart.

Best Practice 5: Validating program impact and value

By measuring your residency program's performance with qualitative and quantitative data, you can understand the benefits for nurses, patients, and top-line organizational goals. Useful tracking tools may include surveys tied to KPIs, weekly goal trackers, checklists, class evaluations, resident evaluations, and preceptor evaluations.

Leading indicators to consider on your own journey include:

+ **Demographics:** General information, academic information, career experience, and other metrics to gain essential insight on new residents.

+ **Nurse turnover:** Identify baseline retention rates to measure how the program is impacting turnover.

+ **Support:** Survey throughout the program to gauge how well new nurses are feeling supported, especially during their first year of residency, to manage stress and avoid high turnover in year two.

+ **Patient safety:** Evaluate how the residency program and new nurses are impacting hospital patient safety metrics.

+ **Nurse stress:** Monitor stress levels and the impact of resiliency and other wellness programs. Consider adding support during high-stress portions of the program.

+ **Communication/leadership:** Track how and why nurses move into leadership roles through open lines of communication and continuous feedback loop from both new nurses and preceptors.

+ **Professional satisfaction:** Evaluate satisfaction with residency, job role, and career path.

+ **Clinical competence:** Assess competence, confidence, and readiness through quizzes and relevant knowledge-checks woven into the program.

+ **Hospital/Financial:** Measure residency program ROI by assessing nurse staffing costs, retention, and turnover.
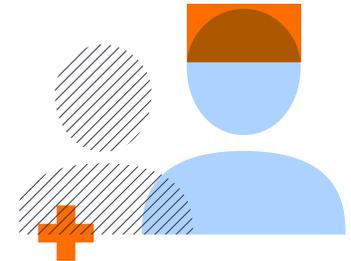
ENHANCING YOUR RESIDENCY PROGRAM FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

By investing in your current residency program, you can help to attract and retain nurses today while strengthening organizational culture for ongoing impact.

New areas of focus: Preceptors, resiliency, culturalization

Current trends are leading organizations to expand residency programs into supporting nurses in different ways. Burnout and stress levels are high among new nurses, making it vital to address these issues early in their careers to improve wellness and satisfaction and reduce turnover. During the pandemic, as new nurses faced mounting pressure due to higher acuity patients, longer hours, and concern for their loved ones, organizations began including resiliency programs and coordinators with well-being check-ins.

They also implemented more substantial mentorships, embedding career coaches within residency programs to guide professional development plans in the first year. Further, residency programs are now focusing on cultural engagement and caring for vulnerable populations, which for many has become mission-critical. These advancements will continue to be essential as hospitals strive to offer more impactful orientation programs that empower confident and competent nurses.

THE POWER OF THE PRECEPTOR

Effective preceptors are integral to nurse residency programs and can even enhance retention by up to 50%.[5] Yet, 85% of preceptors have no formal preceptor education.[6,7]

"The role of the preceptor is powerful, and with the right education and support, these nurse leaders can make a positive impact on your nurse residents," said Helminiak.

Preceptors facilitate orientation, provide supervision, and help new nurses apply learned concepts into practice; and they themselves also need ongoing education to:

+   **Benefit new nurses through invaluable teaching and learning experiences**

+   **Empower their own professional development journeys**

Look for opportunities to advance nurses who are enthused about supporting their peers, enjoy being a resource for their units, and curious about new roles. Developing emerging nurse leaders as they grow into strong preceptors, mentors, educators, and subject matter experts has far-reaching benefits across your organization.

Additionally, by promoting during residency the benefits offered for preceptors (such as additional education and support, compensation, and a career track), you can foster a cultural expectation and interest in your residents becoming preceptors.

Pressing need for quality online nursing education

With hospitals losing on average $4.4 to $7[8] million each year due to nurse turnover, investing in new nurses with a strong residency program can offer bigger picture financial benefit. While in-person education and clinical time are valuable, often, learners spend their time observing versus doing—or interacting with the same types of patients repeatedly.

Virtual learning complements and completes residency programs by offering more time and an efficient way for new nurses to practice, reflect, and gain feedback on their knowledge and abilities. Through high quality virtual education, you can increase nurse competency, confidence, and satisfaction—and in turn, improve retention, care quality, and patient outcomes.

TOOLS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Transition to Practice: Accelerate new nurses' skills and confidence. Transition to Practice virtual learning platform helps quickly build new nurses' professional skills and confidence through a supportive new nurse orientation experience. elsevier.com/transition-to-practice

Clinical Skills: Manage nurse competency and provide consistent care. Clinical Skills is a comprehensive online solution that enables organizations to standardize skills and procedures and manage competency among their nurses and other health professionals. elsevier.com/clinical-skills

Clinical eLearning: Online nursing education to support clinical practice. Clinical eLearning virtual education helps to enhance nurses' knowledge and growth, empowering them to deliver the highest level of care. elsevier.com/clinical-elearning

Shadow Health: Strengthen clinical reasoning and therapeutic communication skills. Shadow Health helps to enhance practice readiness for novice nurses with multidimensional, realistic virtual patient encounters. elsevier.com/shadow-health

1   https://www.nsinursingsolutions.com/Documents/Library/NSI_National_Health_Care_Retention_Report.pdf

2   Windey, M., Lawrence, C., Guthrie, K., Weeks, D., Sullo, E., & Chapa, D., "A Systematic Review on Interventions Supporting Preceptor Development," Journal for Nurses in Professional Development, 31(6), (2015):312-323.

3   "A Worrisome Drop In The Number Of Young Nurses." Auerbach, D., Buerhaus, P., Donelan K., Staiger, D., Health Affairs, April 13, 2022

4   David Kaniaru, Elijah Nyagena, Nebart Kathuri, Alex Chebor. Perception of Preceptor and Student Nurse Partnership on Clinical Teaching and Learning. American Journal of Nursing Science. Vol. 5, No. 4, 2016, pp. 141145. doi: 10.11648/j.ajns.20160504.13

5   Watkins, C., Hart, P., Mareno, N. The effect of preceptor role effectiveness on newly licensed registered nurses' perceived psychological empowerment and professional autonomy, Nurse Education in Practice, Vol 17, March 2016, Pages 36-42

6   Gross, C. "Systematic Review Building a Preceptor Support System," Journal for Nurses in Professional Development (31) 6. (2015).

7   Goss, C. R. (2015). Systematic review building a preceptor support system. Journal for Nurses in Professional Development, 31(1), E7–E14. doi:10.1097/nd.0000000000000117

8   "Want to Keep Nurses at the Bedside? Here's How." Jennifer Thew, RN, HealthLeaders, March 27, 2019