Coaching and Mentorship for Retention of Nurses

What We Know

› The rate of new nurse attrition is high, and 35–60% of new nurses in the United States leave their job in the first year. The current nursing shortage has focused increased attention on recruitment and retention of new nurses\(^{(3,11)}\)

• New nurses commonly experience what is referred to as “reality shock” when they transition from nursing school to the nursing workforce. New nurses lack experience in clinical situations and many lack critical thinking skills and clinical judgment. When faced with a stressful and challenging work environment, new nurses can become frustrated, which increases the likelihood that they will leave the profession of nursing\(^{(1,4)}\)

– Increasing nurse retention facilitates adequate staffing, which directly affects patient safety issues—including medical errors, mortality, and length of stay—and reduces hospital expenditures by reducing costs associated with hiring and training of nurses\(^{(2)}\)

› Mentorship, and to a lesser extent coaching, have been identified as strategies to increase retention of nurses by helping to enculturate (i.e., the process of integrating, assimilating, and expanding one’s awareness in a new setting or culture) new graduates and prepare them for their new role\(^{(1,3,4,10,11)}\)

• Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, coaching and mentorship are not identical. The goal of coaching is immediate improvement of performance and skills, and mentoring focuses on longer-term acquisition of skills and the development of a career\(^{(2)}\)

– Mentorship involves a long-term, voluntary, collaborative, and mutually beneficial relationship that is broad in focus and intent. In mentorship, an experienced professional (i.e., mentor) teaches, supports, and encourages a less experienced novice (i.e., mentee) as the mentee grows and develops professionally and personally and adapts to a new role. Although mentorship requires the use of coaching skills, one does not need to be a mentor to be a coach\(^{(4,5,7)}\)(For more information on mentorship, see Evidence-Based Care Sheet: Mentorship)

– Mentors should ideally possess certain qualities such as confidence, effective communication skills, maturity, intuition, good listening skills, and the ability to be nurturing, nonjudgmental, objective, and patient\(^{(6,9)}\)

- The early stages of the mentoring relationship typically focus on clinical competence, common nursing skills, and strategies for solving problems. Later stages focus on promoting the mentee’s development of advanced nursing skills and being able to conduct a comprehensive nursing evaluation\(^{(4)}\)

– Coaching is a time-limited and focused collaborative, formal relationship between a skilled facilitator (i.e., coach) and an individual or group (i.e., a learner, or client; a group of learners) in which the coach facilitates an information-focused conversation to help the learner(s) achieve certain goals. The coach promotes the development of necessary skills and focuses on developing new behaviors and attitudes to enhance the learner’s performance and effectiveness\(^{(5,7,10)}\)(For more information on coaching, see Evidence-Based Care Sheet: Coaching and the series of Evidence-Based Care Sheets on mentorship and coaching in nursing)
The relationship between mentorship programs and increased nurse retention is well established. This relationship appears to be mediated by the many positive benefits of mentorship for new nurses, including increased confidence and competence in the practice of nursing, reduced work stress, personal and professional growth, increased job satisfaction, enhanced communication and leadership skills, and development of interpersonal relationships with other nurses \(^{1,2,3,4,6,10}\)

• The Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women & Newborns in San Diego, California implemented a mentorship program in 2004. After 1 year, the new graduate 1-year turnover rate had declined from 20% to 7%. The new graduate turnover rate was less than 10% in each of the subsequent 6 years \(^{3}\)
  – Although the annual cost of administering the mentorship program is $58,000, the program led to an estimated savings of more than $300,000 in the first year due to reductions in expenditures related to recruitment and training
  – Many former mentees subsequently serve as mentors for new nurse graduates

• Administrators at Shands Hospital at the University of Florida in Gainesville reported that the implementation of a coaching program in which life coaches worked with nurse managers and staff nurses during a 20-week period led to improvement in organization skills, stress reduction, increased awareness of nursing responsibilities, increased mindfulness, and enhanced ability related to organization, goal setting, planning, and accountability. Nurses who completed the program indicated their intention to remain at the hospital for at least the next two years \(^{10}\)

• One study assessed 153 clinicians working in an acute care hospital to explore the impact mentoring had in affecting personal commitment. The findings showed that when top management encouraged mentoring by implementing educational programs, flexibility in scheduling, and reward systems, the staff felt more committed and stayed in the organization \(^{8}\)

What We Can Do

• Learn about coaching and mentorship and their effects on nurse retention rates; share this information with your colleagues

• If you are a nurse manager, encourage staff nurses, particularly new graduates, to seek mentors
  • Collaborate with administration to identify ways to reduce the workload for mentors and provide relevant education and training about skill building techniques, adult learning strategies, creative teaching strategies, research skills, and communication \(^{4}\)
  • Explore the possibility of providing bonuses for mentors \(^{11}\)

• If you are a new nurse who would like to have a mentor, approach a nurse whose work you admire, ask him or her to be your mentor, and identify what he or she can offer as a mentor \(^{1}\)
  • If you are hesitant to approach potential mentors with this request, remember that they are likely to benefit from the process of being a mentor

• Advocate for funding of mentorship and coaching programs to improve retention of nurses in your facility
References


6. Dunn, D. (2014). Smart management. Where, oh where are the OR nurses: Retention. OR Nurse, 8(5), 8-11. doi:10.1097/01.ORN.0000453335.45094.5b (R)


