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Nurse Preceptors' Perceptions of Non-Traditional Education

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Abstract

Title: Nurse Preceptors' Perceptions of Non-traditional Education
Background: A preceptor is an experienced nurse who teaches and provides feedback to a new orientee on their professional practice for a designated time. The preceptor is the key educator for new nurses in their learning process. Continuing education for the nurse preceptor is necessary to foster the professional development of this complex role.
Aims: The purpose of this study is to determine if nurse preceptors perceive non-traditional education as effective as in-person instruction for preceptor professional development.
Methods: This descriptive study used a convenient sample. An educational journal was created covering a variety of topics that aide in the growth and development of the nurse preceptor. The education was sent electronically to nurse preceptors in a critical care setting. Preceptors were required to read the journal and complete a post-test. Once completed, nurse preceptors were invited to participate in the study. A 25-item questionnaire, using a 5-point Likert scale, was sent via email. Nurse preceptors were given one month to voluntarily participate in the study. Responses to the survey were scored and averaged.
Findings: There were a total of 14 participants. Not all items were answered by each participant. Eighty-six percent were BSN prepared, 14% were MSN prepared. The majority of participants (71%, n= 10) have been preceptors for 2 or more years in their current practice setting. Some participants did not attend the previous in-person preceptor education (4 out of 14). All participants completed the non-traditional (journal) education. Nearly all participants (92%, n=12 out of 13) believed that the non-traditional educational journal had high impact. When responding to educational preferences, 61.5% preferred to receive preceptor education in a non-traditional format while 38% preferred to receive education in both non-traditional and traditional formats. The study results provide a better understating of the educational preferences of the nurse preceptor. This information is vital for the development for future preceptor education programs. Tailoring education to the learners preferred methods can make education more impactful. Providing meaningful education to preceptors will improve their practice, further benefiting the experience of the newly hired/transferred nurses. The study may be applicable to other practice areas and/or organizations.

Background

A preceptor is an experienced nurse who teaches and provides feedback to a new orientee on their professional practice. The preceptor is the key educator for new nurses in their learning process (Cotter, 2016). This role is complex. Preceptors are role models. The nurse preceptor fosters competent care and critical thinking. They aid in building professional relationships with co-workers. A successful nurse preceptor provides individualized instruction, while providing the learner with constructive and timely feedback (Chen et al., 2019).

The role of the nurse preceptor has a large impact on nurse sensitive indicators. A new nurse learns best practices from the preceptor, such as central line and catheter care and maintenance. In a critical care setting the nurse preceptor has even more of a responsibility because of the acuity of the patients. The nurse preceptor influences the retention of new nurses. If new nurses feel a sense of belonging and are a part of a team, they are more likely to stay in their new practice environment (Cotter 2016). Each of these factors have influence on the success of the healthcare organization (Chen et al., 2019).

Literature supports that nurse preceptors need continuing education (Cotter, 2016). Nurse preceptors can drive their learning in the non-traditional learning environment, whereas in traditional education the whole group learns at the same knowledge level (Green & Huntington, 2017). Non-traditional education is flexible, allowing the nurse preceptor to adjust the pace. With current staffing trends and financial constraints, the need for online learning opportunities for nurses will continue to increase (Green & Huntington, 2017). Healthcare organizations can benefit from nurse preceptors receiving non-traditional education.

Aims

The purpose of this study is to determine if nurse preceptors perceive non-traditional education as effective as in-person instruction for preceptor professional development.

Methods

This descriptive study used a convenient sample. All nurse preceptors on P4 SICU were required to attend annual preceptor education. In previous years, the preceptor educational sessions were in-person classes with lecture and discussion. After attending the educational session, the preceptors completed a course evaluation and received continuing education credits. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, the annual education was offered in an alternative format.

A journal was created by the P4 Clinical Nurse Specialists, Unit Director, and Nurse Educators (Figure 1). The journal cover a variety of topics that aide in the growth and development of the nurse preceptor. The education was sent via email to the P4 SICU nurse preceptors. The nurse preceptors read the journal and completed a post-test and program evaluation. They were instructed turn in the post-test and program evaluation to receive credit and the continuing education certificate.

Once the nurse preceptors completed educational requirements, the study email was sent to P4 SICU nurse preceptors. The email included an informational letter and questionnaire, which was formatted in a 5-point Likert scale. There are 4 sections and a total of 25 response items. The sections included demographics, in-person preceptor education, preceptor journal, and educational preference. The questionnaire compared the independent study to a previously attended in-person preceptor educational offering, and preceptor preferences. The questionnaire took 5-10 minutes to complete. The window to participate in the study and complete the survey was be 45 days.



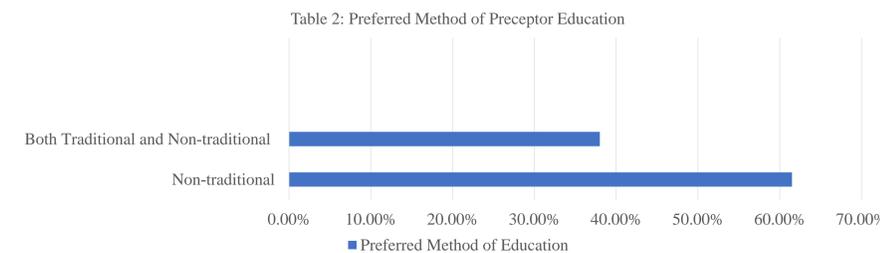
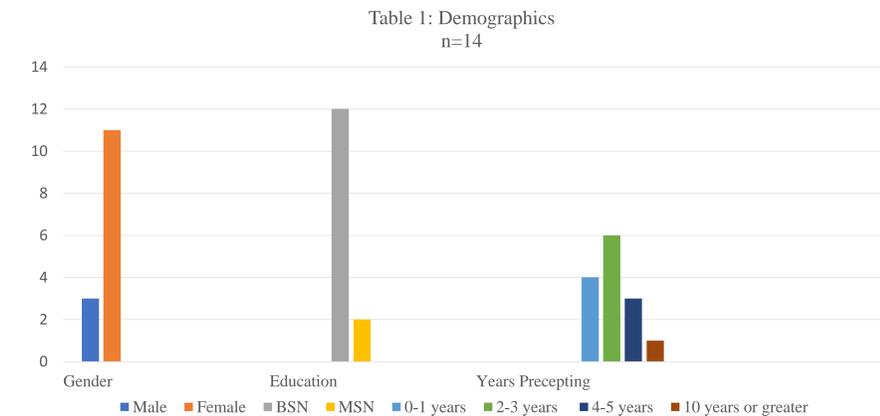
Figure 1. The PRECEPTOR is the Journal that was created for the project. The journal was four pages in length and covered various topics relevant to the P4 nurse preceptor.

Topics included:

- Updated references for the preceptors
- Highlighted changed to down code days
- Explanations of new checklists
- Benefits of post-shift debriefing
- Creating positive experiences for the extern
- Advocating for the learner
- Tools to evaluate progress of the learner
- The influence of the preceptor
- Self-care of the preceptor

Findings

There were a total of 14 nurse preceptors who participated in the study. Not all items were answered by each participant. Eighty-six percent of the nurse preceptors who participated in the study were BSN prepared. The remaining 14% of participants were MSN prepared. The majority of participants self-reported being preceptors for two or more years in their current practice setting (71%, n= 10) (Table 1). Not all participants attended the previous in-person preceptor education (4 out of 14), however all participants completed the non-traditional (journal) education. Nearly all participants (92%, n=12 out of 13) believed that the non-traditional educational journal had high impact. When responding to educational preferences, 61.5% preferred to receive preceptor education in a non-traditional format while 38% would prefer to receive education in a hybrid format that includes non-traditional and traditional education (Table 2).



Discussion

The study results provide a better understating of the educational preferences of the nurse preceptor. This information is vital for the development for future preceptor education programs. Tailoring education to the learners preferred methods can make education more impactful. Providing meaningful education to preceptors will improve their practice, further benefiting the experience of the newly hired/transferred nurses. The study may be applicable to other practice areas and/or organizations.

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