

Foreword *by Kathy Sanford*

Sometimes when I'm reminiscing with colleagues of my generation, we engage in discussions about our early days in acute care practice. Invariably, many of us describe our first hospital caregiver experiences as less than smooth. We ruefully speak of our personal lack of organization skills, early patient care errors, inadequate coping abilities, culture shock, and—most of all—our fear. We share that we were afraid of looking foolish; afraid of not knowing how to respond to disrespectful treatment from other clinicians; and, foremost in our minds, afraid of causing harm to our patients.

The most common description of our orientation to the life of a clinical nurse is that we were “thrown into the role” with inadequate understanding of, or preparation for, our responsibilities. We shake our heads and wonder how our patients survived our lack of expertise, and how *we* survived and thrived in this gloriously complex profession. Then we remember that some of our past friends and coworkers have not shared in this long-term experience. They chose not to stay in the field. We've all met people who introduce themselves as someone who “used to be a nurse.” As I read my advance copy of this handbook, I theorized about how many of these former clinicians might still be contributing their talents and education to patient care if their early experiences had included the guidance and coaching of their more experienced peers.

Today, we try to do a better job of onboarding new nursing team members. Almost every organization has some sort of organized orientation program. Many have formally designated preceptor programs. In spite of these improvements, turnover among new graduates remains high. Some early-career nurses describe their first year in the workforce in much the same way as my contemporaries do. We are still on the journey toward finding a way to provide a better transition from student to graduate nurse. *Mastering Precepting: A Nurse's Handbook for Success* is a tool to help us get there. It focuses on improving the skills of those who serve as preceptors, not only for new graduates but for nurses transitioning from any nursing role into another. Its underlying premise is that we can improve our precepting abilities and, in doing so, can contribute to the enrichment of other nurses' careers.

It's rewarding to think that each of us can have a positive influence on one individual's professional life, but the one-to-one relationship that a preceptor and preceptee develop is not the sum total of what excellent precepting can do for our organizations, our communities, and our profession. How many nurses will become more skilled at what they do because of programs designed to support students, new graduates, new hires, and colleagues who are

moving into a new specialty? How many might extend their nursing careers as a result? How many patients will receive safe, quality care because of a well-crafted precepting program?

There is a correlation among these questions, of course. Individuals who continue to practice nursing mitigate community shortages of caregivers. Communities and patients receive better care from competent, self-assured, and assertive nurses. Preceptors help their less experienced colleagues gain this competency, self-assurance, and assertiveness. That is, they serve as guides for this professional development—but only if they themselves are skilled in the art and science of precepting.

Beth Ulrich and the contributing authors of this book clearly understand that there is more to serving as a preceptor than a title or having enough experience in a job to orient a new team member to policies, procedures, and “the way we do things around here.” Their attention to this role indicates a deep respect for the skilled nurse preceptor, an appreciation for the responsibility and challenges involved in the work of competent precepting, and a recognition of the far-reaching influence preceptors have on nursing careers and patient care. Chapter by chapter, these experts share their experience, dispensing useful advice along with enough underlying theory and research findings to explain why the practical applications work. The “handbook” title is accurate: This collection of topics adds up to a volume that can serve not only as a primer for a new preceptor but a resource to consult as needed over a lifetime of precepting.

It's clear that the authors hope that readers who choose to be preceptors will continue to perform in this role throughout their careers. They understand that the proficiencies of a good nurse preceptor, like the proficiencies of a good nursing manager, are not inherent in everyone. Even those who are predisposed to mentor or aid others in their career development need to learn and practice new skills. There are competencies that are separate from other clinical abilities that make the preceptor's role a specialty or, if you prefer, a subspecialty to a major clinical specialty.

This book is a gift to nursing, not just to those who choose to serve as a preceptor. If you read it from start to finish, you will have a thorough picture of the role. You will have a better understanding of how important each precepting opportunity is to the future of nursing and health care. Finally, you'll have practical steps to take as you serve as guide and coach to an individual professional colleague.

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Foreword *by Gwen Sherwood*

There are many approaches to teaching and learning; learning “by doing” is a time-honored pedagogy for service professions. Indeed, the apprentice style is a major point of discussion in the 2010 book *Educating Nurses: A Call for Radical Transformation* (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day). Learning by doing is not haphazard trial and error, but requires systematic approaches based on learner objectives negotiated between preceptee and preceptor, consideration of learning styles and learning context, and effective use of available resources. To learn by doing involves careful coaching, facilitation, mentoring, guidance, and supervision by a skilled practitioner of the craft being learned. While supervision from preceptors is a standard learning approach, our profession has often overlooked the special skills required of excellent preceptors, and the point that not all great clinicians make effective preceptors. Good precepting, like good teaching or good nursing care, is a carefully developed expertise that evolves over time. *Mastering Precepting: A Nurse’s Handbook for Success* fills the gap by offering a comprehensive guide to the apprenticeship learning model for nurse educators, managers, and preceptors.

Teaching involves craft. There is both an art and a science in teaching preceptors as well. Preceptors not only guide skill acquisition based on the science of nursing—they also practice the art of nursing by helping learners reflect on their experiences to examine the meaning, objectively looking at varying perspectives of an event, to “make sense” of it within the context of empirical knowledge as well as other circumstances that influence the situation. Reflecting-in and reflecting-on action to learn from one’s experiences are the bases of Benner’s (1984) *From Novice to Expert*. Preceptors are front-line guides who observe the learner’s developing competencies and thus have a key role in evaluation and assessment.

At all levels and in all settings, the work of nursing is physically and emotionally intense. A lack of opportunity to reflect on practice to make sense of events can lead to burnout; the complexities of relationships and caregiving need to be examined in a systematic way and wrestled with to come to terms with how to balance the ideal response with the reality of the course of events to reach a resolution for changing the response in future situations. For most learners, this requires a guide, coach, facilitator, or mentor who can enter the dialogue and offer alternative perspectives and assessment.

Authored by an experienced educator, scholar, and clinician who has been closely involved in developing transition to practice programs for new graduate nurses, this book provides clear steps for preceptor orientation, qualifications, and skills to prepare preceptors

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for their key role in education. Reflective teachers themselves must be able to reflect to make sense of their teaching. *Mastering Precepting* does not leave preceptor preparation to chance, but offers a toolkit to effective competency development. It is a book that all nursing education programs should have, whether located in clinical settings for transition to practice programs and new employee orientation, or in academic settings for guiding learners in a capstone course or advanced practice clinical experiences.

Preceptors support the pillars of education by guiding preceptees in learning to do, know, be, and work/live together. As key role models, they are in a sense the keepers of our discipline by linking the learner's education foundation with the clinical world. They themselves must understand the double helix of the theoretical basis for nursing practice, and how that feeds back into educational development in seeking knowledge to have relevant evidence for care delivery. This critical book helps recognize the art and the science of excellent precepting, helping learners bridge the nursing education and practice worlds.

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