Breaking Down Barriers

Various strategies can be implemented by preceptors and educators during orientation that may assist in mitigating or removing barriers to male success in nursing.

- Include males in your marketing materials.
- Ensure that both sexes have equal opportunity in all clinical experiences and assignments.
- Seek out male preceptors that could serve as role models for male students and new employees.
- Include a teaching component on therapeutic touch in tandem with cultural sensitivity in orientation.
- Use an exchange of pronouns in practice and test questions, and education materials (many assume the nurse is female, i.e., she, her, hers).

References:

Minority Growing Pains: Men in Nursing

Diversity in the workforce is generally seen as a positive factor: aiding the ability of workers to meet the needs of a diverse population with which they interact. During the Preceptor Academy, we discussed diversity in generation, gender, learning styles, culture and values. Gender diversity in the nursing profession, and within schools of nursing, remains starkly imbalanced with the increasing diversity of our patient population.

Despite repeated calls for increasing the number of males in nursing and gains in recruiting and graduating male nurses, males only represent around 15 percent of students in pre-licensure registered nurse programs and around 10 percent of the nursing workforce.

In a patriarchal society where male privilege typically affords men higher rates of receiving job offers, higher pay and increased likelihood of promotion, it may be difficult to imagine what barriers that men in nursing encounter. Are there barriers to entering nursing school? Are there barriers during nursing school? Are there barriers in the clinical setting? Are there barriers finding employment or upon employment? What is the role of the preceptor in creating an environment where men will survive and thrive in nursing?

Given the difficulty to recruit, graduate and retain employed male nurses, much research exists on this topic, identifying a wide array of barriers. The barriers loosely fall into three categories:

- Female-associated career field: current female domination; historic/cultural meanings; association with child birth/breastfeeding
- Discrimination/isolation: feelings of loneliness, isolation and differentness; social marginalization; unequal clinical opportunities
- Lack of support: lack of male nursing role models, mentors and faculty; lack of information and support from guidance counselors/career advisors

It is not surprising that male nursing students and newly graduated male nurses experience high attrition rates and failure. Preceptors can impact this phenomenon by being aware of the barriers men face and commit to creating a more supportive environment.

Strategies for retention include providing support and mentorship programs with other male nurses, faculty or peers; creating occasions to work together, such as committees or group service opportunities; and recognizing the contributions of men in nursing and a more diverse workforce.

These strategies can help build community, a sense of belonging, self-concept, resilience and prevent isolation. As other barriers are overcome and more males enter nursing, the female association barrier also may resolve.