

Preceptor News

Written by: Kimberly Cornwell, MS, APRN, FNP-C, The University of Kansas

January/February 2024

Helping Your Preceptee Cope with Reality Shock

Health care providers tend to be most vulnerable during the “shock phase”. At this point, they often realize that their expectations are not consistent with actual job or role expectations. The preceptor plays an essential role in helping the preceptee cope with managing expectations by developing a supportive relationship that includes trust and respect.

Tips for helping your preceptee cope with the “shock phase” include the following.

1. Be a good listener. Remember, listen to hear, not to respond.
2. Provide opportunities to vent frustrations in a constructive manner.
3. Help with setting clear expectations; all health care institutions have room for improvement.
4. Discourage negativity or involvement in negative group think as it may escalate the problems the preceptee is experiencing.
5. Encourage healthy behaviors, such as getting enough sleep and eating properly.
6. Promote follow-up with peers to discuss shared experiences or help to set up a support network.
7. Educate preceptee on the value of reflective journaling.

Reality shock is not always linear so be aware of regressions that can occur between stages.

The Realities of “Reality Shock”

Reality shock, also described as transition shock, often occurs as new health care providers move from the educational setting into the work setting. More specifically, it's what happens when there is a large difference between what one expects and what one experiences. As a preceptor, the importance of understanding this reality cannot be ignored as most new graduates will experience some degree of reality shock. During this transition, new graduates are learning to navigate a constantly evolving health care environment while acquiring new clinical skills, adjusting to new co-workers and managing complex patient care. Although many new graduates can successfully transition during this period, others experience increased stress, anxiety, self-doubt, difficulty coping, cynicism and role confusion.

The Four Phases of Reality Shock

Honeymoon: A period of excitement where one is energetic and eager to learn. Optimism and idealism dominate during this time.

Shock: The realization that differences exist between what one learned in school and what one sees in the work environment. Emotional withdrawal and fatigue dominate during this phase.

Recovery: A period of moving beyond the shock phase through the use of various tools to find balance between the positive and negative experiences. This phase is characterized by reduced anxiety and increased coping ability.

Resolution: This phase can proceed in one of two ways: Successfully transitioning to a confident and competent provider, or burnout with the possibility of changing positions or leaving the profession entirely.

Remember, the ultimate responsibility of serving as a preceptor is to place a competent co-worker into practice.

The Consequences of Not Addressing Reality Shock

The consequences of not addressing reality shock can vary depending on the degree to which it is experienced. Additionally, consequences can have an impact on not only the individual experiencing it, but the workplace and patients.

Individual: Discouragement, lack of motivation, increased psychological distress, fear of working independently in chosen profession, concern over inconsistencies in actual practice, lack of job satisfaction, questioning of chosen profession, burnout

Workplace: High turnover rate, financial strains due to replacement costs, leaving the profession altogether, poor staffing, workload increases for co-workers

Patient: Decreased patient satisfaction, decreased quality of care provided

References:

Labrague, L. (2024). Reality shock in newly graduate critical care nurses and its association with missed nursing care: The mediating role of caring ability. *Intensive and Critical Care Nursing*, 80.

Wakefield, E. (2018). Is your graduate nurse suffering from transition shock? *Journal of Perioperative Nursing*, 31(1). doi.org/10.26550/2209-10

For information about the Missouri Preceptor Academy, contact Jean Klindt at jklindt@mhanet.com, 573-893-3700, ext. 1337.


MHA
Health Institute


Missouri
Preceptor
Academy