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9 Ways to
Welcome & Protect
Your New Graduate Nurses
So They Stay........

The hiring pool for experienced nurses is dwindling fast causing healthcare organizations to hire more new graduate nurses.

To help them hit the ground running, an aggressive orientation coupled with a robust residency program is essential in helping them to transition into professional practice.

The problem is, enrolling new graduate nurses into a residency program is not enough.

How are you making sure these new graduate nurses are also equipped to address bullying and incivility in their workplace?

What are you doing to help them to feel welcomed? After all, they're entering a new environment which historically, hasn't always been welcoming to new graduate nurses.

Bottom line - If you're not welcoming and protecting them, they will leave.

Here are **9 ways to welcome and protect** your new graduate nurses as they transition into professional practice.

1 **Connect BEFORE they start**

Calling your new graduate nurses about a week prior to their start date is a HUGE de-stressor. Welcome them to the unit and let them know you're excited to be their leader. Ask if they have any questions and if there is anything you can do to support them prior to their start date.

Here are some sample questions and statements:

- Do you know where to park on your first day?
- Do you know where to go on your first day?
- Do you have your schedule for the first week?
- _____ is going to be your preceptor.
- Here's what your first few weeks will look like on the unit.
- Do you have any specific questions for me?

Additional ideas include:

- Send them a welcome card with signatures from your team.
- Send them examples of any newsletters or memos your department creates.
- Send them a $10 gift certificate to your cafeteria or coffee cart.

2 **Celebrate their first day on the unit**

Studies show that how a person feels on their first day of work sets the tone for the rest of their time there! Think about it. These new nurses are experiencing three major transitions: new work, new people, and a new place. And that's why it's critical to create an amazing first day experience.

Here are a few ideas:

- Make sure everyone on the ENTIRE team knows the day they are starting, this includes physicians and providers.
- When they walk onto the unit, ask everyone to greet them and introduce themselves.
- Welcome them with a sign or card signed by the entire team.
- Feed them! Throw a party. Food makes a big positive first impression.

3 **Introduce them to the interprofessional team**

It's hard being the new person and not knowing everyone on the unit. Who are the physicians, providers, ancillary staff, and techs? Make sure you introduce your new graduate nurses to everyone. It helps them feel important and sets the expectation that yes – they are ALL part of the team.

A few tips:

- If you have "sister" units (PACU, OR, SDS), be sure to walk them through those departments to meet their colleagues.
- During their first week, find an opportunity for them to also meet the Executive team too!
- Don't forget to introduce them during shift change to the team who will be taking over the care of their patients.

④ Protect new graduate nurses during shift report

One of the biggest stressors for new graduate nurses is giving report to some of the more experienced nurses. Like a mother bear to her cubs, ensure their preceptor stands next to your new graduate nurses and advocates on their behalf IF that nurse starts attacking!

A good technique to help them become more confident when giving report is to use the Leadership Square method described in #5: *Protect new graduate nurses from mistakes*.

A few more tips:

- Have an honest conversation with any nurse who's known for being "tough" on new nurses. Let them know that you need them to be supportive. Not critical.
- Set an expectation before your new graduate nurses start that during critical times such as giving report, you expect everyone to behave in a respectful manner.
- If you learn that someone was rude or unprofessional, immediately let your new graduate nurses know the way they were treated was unprofessional. And then immediately have a conversation with that individual – don't ignore it. Saying or hearing someone say, "Well, that's just the way they are" is unacceptable!

⑤ Protect new graduate nurses from mistakes

We know that new graduate nurses are at an increased risk to make mistakes. Encourage your preceptors to watch out for them, especially when managing difficult tasks involving high-risk interventions (i.e., blood transfusions, medication administration, IV infusions, etc.). Reassure them it's important they ask their preceptors, or you questions any time they aren't sure about ANYTHING.

A great framework to use is the Leadership Square. Think of each side of the square:

Step #1: Educate on the skill as they watch you perform the skill. Then debrief.

Step #2: Together you perform the skill. They do a part – you do a part. Then debrief.

Step #3: They perform the skill independently with you as the "guide on the side". Then debrief.

Step #4: They perform the skill independently. Then debrief, sharing insight and constructive feedback.

If they do make a mistake, support them by reassuring and comforting them.

⑥ Immediately shut down any gossip

For whatever reason, some employees love picking on the new people. If you hear any gossip about the new graduate nurses, immediately stop it. Remind whoever is gossiping the entire team's goal is to support, protect, and nurture new employees.

If you hear someone gossiping about a new nurse, here are a few scripts you can use/share:

- This sounds like gossip to me and not at all helpful.
- If the situation were reversed, would you want someone gossiping about you or being direct?
- Instead of criticizing and gossiping about _____ let's help and support them.
- We all started as new nurses. Let's not forget what it was like and instead of complaining, how about we help them?

7   Encourage frequent positive reinforcement

Studies show that when someone is in the learning phase, they need frequent positive reinforcement. Any chance you get, say something positive to your new graduate nurses. They need to hear good things from ALL members of the team!

Providing positive feedback needs to be specific not vague.

For example, "You handled the patient's complaint so well today. You listened and then offered to help solve the problem" versus "You did a great job today!"

Remember, be specific when giving positive reinforcement so they know exactly what to repeat.

8   Verify assignments are fair and appropriate

As soon as new graduate nurses are off orientation, they tend to get the worst patient assignments. This should be a *never event*! It's critically important to give new nurses the easiest assignments when they are on their own until they master their foundational skills. Then, layer more difficult assignments over time as they become more confident in their role.

This requires the preceptor and the person making the assignments are in constant communication about their readiness to advance.

9   Protect them from difficult patients and family members

Instead of throwing them into a difficult patient and/or family's situation as a rite of passage, accompany them with any tough situations. Although you may encourage them to handle the situation, especially as part of their professional growth and development, always stand by their side and intervene as needed.

> Everyone on the healthcare team should go out of their way to welcome, support, and protect new graduate nurses (or any new team member). Just like a mother bear protects her cubs, the team needs to protect theirs too. If every healthcare team member welcomed, supported, and protected new team members, these new graduate nurses would safely and quickly transition into professional practice and would be more likely to stay!

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