Selecting Nurse Preceptors:
What Qualities & Characteristics Should Be Considered?

Sigma Theta Tau 23rd International Nursing Research Congress, 2012
E. Ann Mohide, Associate Professor, McMaster University, School of Nursing
On Behalf of the Preceptor Selection Study Group
eamoh@mcmaster.ca
Preceptor Selection Study Group: Membership

E. Ann Mohide¹
Barb Jennings¹,²
Noori Akhtar-Danesh¹
Wendy Seidlitz²
Dianne Norman¹,²
Olivia Gerardi¹
Vanessa Cavalieri¹
Colleen McKey¹

McMaster University, School of Nursing, Hamilton ON, Canada¹
Hamilton Health Sciences, Hamilton ON, Canada²

This project was funded by McMaster University School of Nursing and its Nursing Education Research Unit (NERU)
Background

- Significance of direct care nurses in experiential learning at the senior level of BScN education
- Importance of preceptored education in successful transition to professional nursing
- Practical importance to the administration of our Preceptorship Program
Research Objective

- Of 24 preceptor qualities/characteristics deemed to be important for preceptor selection, which are judged to be the most important qualities/characteristics by five stakeholder groups?

- Stakeholder Groups
  - Preceptors & RNs
  - Agency educators
  - Agency administrators
  - Faculty
  - Students
Literature Review

Myrick & Barrett (1992)
- Cross-sectional survey using a mailed questionnaire to Deans/Directors of Canadian Schools of Nursing
- Clinical competence ranked highest

Coates & Gormley (1997)
- Case study approach in UK involving preceptors (n=62), students (n=15), managers (n=6) & teachers (n=8)
- Knowledge of the clinical area and experience “greatest asset” viewed by preceptors

Kaviani & Stillwell (2000)
- Subjects in NZ included preceptors (n=6) & 3rd year students (n=13) who participated in focus groups; nurse managers (n=2) had face-to-face interviews
- Analysis grouped by categories → “preceptor” findings re characteristics, e.g., clinical competence, knowledge and expertise, self-confidence, enthusiasm
Altman (2006)
- Replicated Myrick & Barrett (1992) survey using a US sample (n=156 usable responses)
- As reported by Myrick & Barrett (1992) clinical competence ranked highest

Zilembo & Monterosso (2008)
- In a descriptive, mixed methods study, 23 Australian undergraduate nursing students identified whether specific preceptor leadership qualities were desirable (yes, no, etc.)
- Clinical competence & purposefulness were the highest rated desirable characteristics (n=23)
Methods Overview

Phase 1
Instrument development

Phase 2
Cross-sectional survey
Phase 1: Instrument Development

- Participants (n=149) from 5 stakeholder groups:
  - Faculty, students, RNs, agency educators, agency administrators
  - All affiliated with McMaster University School of Nursing and/or Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS); a large tertiary hospital with acute, long-term & ambulatory services

- Written opinions about preceptorship provided

- Content analysis to identify key words/phrases (n=1004 phrases/words)

- 8 categories finalized: 5 categories include >1 topic area
## Results of Content Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Topic Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Clinical Practice, Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Life Long Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Confidence, Commitment, Comportment, Compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching-Learning</td>
<td>Role Development, Theory, Feedback, Supervision, Enthusiasm for Teaching, Attention to Learner Needs, Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Interprofessional, Nursing Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Role Modelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Attributes</td>
<td>Patience, Acceptance/Tolerance, Adaptability, Calm, Open-minded about Professional Practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
24 Characteristics & Qualities

- Accepting of other’s differences
- Adaptable
- Applies up-to-date, high quality research to nursing care
- Calm under pressure
- Clinically competent
- Committed to nursing
- Confident in own nursing practice
- Displays patience with others
- Enthusiastic about working with students
- Empathetic towards learners
- Gives timely (+) and (-) feedback for improvement
- Good interpersonal skills
24 Characteristics & Qualities

- Has formal preceptor role preparation
- Identifies student’s learning needs and facilitates learning
- Integrates student comfortable into nursing team
- Life long learner
- Looks and acts professional
- Open to making changes in personal practice
- Passionate about nursing
- Promotes student autonomy, where appropriate
- Provides guidance for problem solving and clinical judgement
- Respectful of other health disciplines
- Role model for clinical nursing leadership
- Uses teaching/learning principles well
Rating Scale Description

- Similar in appearance to a large thermometer
- Numbers on the scale range from 0 to 100 (top)
- Labelled in increments of five with a line at each number between increments
- Participants instructed to place all 24 cards on the scale between 0 & 100 in the order of choice
  - 100 = most important quality or characteristic
  - 0 = least important
- Rules: Cards can be placed anywhere on the scale but no two cards could be placed on the same value
Phase 2: Survey

- **Design**: Cross-sectional survey
- **Setting**: HHS, a tertiary hospital with outpatient services and a university school of nursing in an urban southwestern Ontario city
- **Participants**: Subjects (n=166) include hospital nurse preceptors (& RNs without preceptor experience), educators, administrators, and university faculty and students
- **Methods**: Subjects ordered 24 preceptor qualities/characteristics on a rating scale in a face-to-face interview
## Findings

**Table 1: No. (%) of Participants in Each Stakeholder Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Groups</th>
<th>No. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>27 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>62 (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNs/Preceptors</td>
<td>55 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency Educators</td>
<td>10 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency Administrators</td>
<td>12 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>166 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty</td>
<td>No. Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgery</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine/Surgery</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Care</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal/Child</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pediatrics</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geriatrics &amp; Rehab</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10 Highest Ranked Qualities/Characteristics

1. Clinically competent*
2. Enthusiasm for teaching^
3. Provides guidance for problem-solving & clinical judgement*^
4. Confident in own nursing practice*
5. Identifies student’s learning needs & facilitates learning^
6. Gives positive and negative feedback in a constructive manner^
7. Good interpersonal skills*
8. Empathetic towards learners^
9. Promotes student autonomy, when appropriate^
10. Passionate about nursing*
Table 3: Highest Rankings Revealed Two Clear Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nursing Role</th>
<th>Teaching Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinically competent</td>
<td>Enthusiasm for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides guidance for problem-solving &amp; clinical judgement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in own nursing practice</td>
<td>Identifies student’s learning needs &amp; facilitates learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good interpersonal skills</td>
<td>Gives +ve &amp; -ve feedback in a constructive manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate about nursing</td>
<td>Empathetic towards learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotes student autonomy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Test-retest Reliability for Highest Ranked Qualities & Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Qualities &amp; Characteristics</th>
<th>Time 1 Ranking (n=22)</th>
<th>Time 2 Ranking (n=22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinically competent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic about working with students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides guidance in problem-solving &amp; clinical judgement</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident in own nursing practice</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies student’s learning needs &amp; facilitates learning</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives +ve &amp; –ve feedback in a constructive manner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good interpersonal skills</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathetic towards learners</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes student autonomy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate about nursing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrates students comfortably into the nursing team</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Asterisks indicate a two-way tie; underlined numbers indicate ranking below the top ten
Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

- Multiple stakeholder groups
- Stakeholders generated content, supp. by literature
- Large sample size
- Quantitative approach enabling practical use of data
- Reliability testing

Limitations

- Almost no agency participants from mental health services
- Need health sector representation from the community
- Require prospective study designs to determine if key qualities or characteristics lead to better student outcomes
Implications

- Awareness & understanding of these characteristics and qualities may be helpful to nursing personnel responsible for selecting preceptors.

- Educators responsible for providing preceptor education and support (in health agencies or educational institutions) should teach to these qualities/characteristics.

- Preceptors or nurses aspiring to become preceptors can use these qualities to target knowledge & skill development for the role & for self-reflection.

- Some of the highest ranked qualities or characteristics should be included in evaluative measures of preceptor performance.
Future Research Directions

- Use by health agencies to select preceptors

- Examination of rankings in varied health settings (e.g., community health, ambulatory clinics) & specialties (e.g., psychiatry & pediatrics)

- Predictive research needed to determine the relationship between qualities/characteristics & student outcomes
References


Qualities/Characteristics Ranking

Clinically competent 1
Enthusiasm for teaching 2
Provides guidance for problem-solving and clinical judgement 3

Confident in own nursing practice 4
Identifies student’s learning needs and facilitates learning 5
Gives positive and negative feedback in a constructive manner 6

Good interpersonal skills 7
Empathetic towards learners 8
Promotes student autonomy, when appropriate 9

Passionate about nursing 10
Integrates students’ comfortably into nursing team 11
Displays patience with others 12
Qualities/Characteristics Rankings

Committed to nursing 13
Role model for clinical nursing leadership 14
Calm under pressure 15

Adaptable 16
Respectful of other health disciplines 17
Life-long learner 18

Accepting of others’ differences 19
Looks and acts professional 20
Applies up-to-date, high quality research to nursing care 21

Open to making changes in personal practice 22
Uses teaching-learning principles well 23
Has formal preceptor role preparation 24