

## **Preceptorship Scenarios and Strategies**

### ***1. Orientee whose performance is progressing too slowly***

- a. Review the target date specified on the preceptor pathway with the orientee.
- b. Solicit the orientee's impressions regarding reasons and obstacles causing slow progress.
- c. Share your observations regarding the orientee's progress and compare these to the orientee's perceptions.
- d. Reach consensus on factors that would assist in facilitating completion of orientation.
- e. Renegotiate intermediate target dates and mutual responsibilities in the preceptor pathway for timely completion of orientation.
- f. Monitor the orientee more frequently to ensure timely completion of program.

**2. *Orientee who overestimates his or her capabilities***

- a. Identify 1 or 2 concrete examples of situations in which you believe the orientee overestimated his or her capabilities.
- b. Solicit the preceptee's opinions regarding his or her readiness and ability to manage each of these situations.
- c. Inquire about the preceptee's reasons for not requesting preceptor assistance (to determine whether anxiety, embarrassment, inability to locate the preceptor, or other potential causes can be indentified).
- d. Compare the preceptee's impressions with your perceptions to distinguish areas of agreement and disagreement regarding situations where the preceptee still needs preceptor supervision or assistance; attempt to reach consensus on these areas.
- e. If helpful, review the preceptor pathway and 90 day competency items to distinguish activities that the orientee can perform independently from those that warrant preceptor supervision or assistance.

**3. *Orientee who underestimates his or her capabilities***

- a. Follow the same general strategies as for scenario 2, with a focus on underestimating (versus overestimating) one's capabilities.
- b. In addition, offer generous verbal support and encouragement to the preceptee regarding his or her demonstrated capabilities to effectively manage clinical situations.

**4. *Orientee whose work is disorganized and rarely completed within a reasonable period of time***

- a. Identify at least 2 specific examples of inefficient work organization and priority setting by the orientee that you have recently observed.
- b. Ask the orientee how he or she determines the order in which the assignments are completed and the factors that influence this decision. Compare the orientee's responses with the factors affecting work organization.
- c. Ask the orientee how he or she determines the relative priority of work activities within the time available and compare the orientee's responses with the factors influencing priority setting.
- d. Reach consensus with the orientee regarding alternative approaches for how he or she can improve work organization.
- e. For a number of consecutive days, assist the orientee in planning the order and priority of work activities at the start of the work day; monitor his or her progress and lend further guidance every few hours during those days until all work elements are completed on time on a consistent basis.

5. *Orientee who performs unfamiliar skills without first seeking the preceptor's supervision or guidance*
- a. Because this situation is a variant of scenario 2, use the same general strategies suggested for that scenario.
  - b. Make every attempt to determine the specific reasons why the orientee is not seeking the preceptor's guidance. In addition to logistical problems such as inability to locate the preceptor, consider that the orientee may hesitate to mention past experiences when the preceptor took control from the orientee, made the orientee uncomfortable or embarrassed to request help, was overly critical of the orientee's performance, or hurried the orientee through a procedure. Expect that orientees will be sensitive to both the nature and manner in which feedback is conveyed. If negative feedback was perceived by the orientee, whether it was intended or not, convert this to constructive feedback to reestablish rapport.

**6. *A “know-it-all” orientee who ignores the preceptor’s suggestions or direction***

- a. New staff members may behave as if they “know it all” for a number of reasons, including to establish credibility as a newcomer and to feel accepted and respected by their peers. Orientees may demonstrate their know-how overtly and independently when they feel insecure. Some new staff, especially those who were respected senior staff at their former workplace, may be discomforted by the orientee role, which makes them feel like students again.

- b. The basic strategy in this situation is twofold: 1) to openly and abundantly acknowledge and commend orientees for areas where they have demonstrated excellent performance, and 2) to minimize any perceived threats to their professional integrity by maintaining a colleague-to-colleague relationship rather than a teacher-to-student relationship. The latter may be facilitated by characterizing the orientation evaluation process as an affirmation or validation process rather than one of critiquing or testing.

- c. After these strategies have been initiated, describe at least 1 situation when the orientee appeared to ignore your suggestions and elicit the orientee's perceptions and rationale for his or her actions. Clarify the dynamics of this situation together and try to reach agreement regarding how you can work together more effectively in the future, including what you can learn from each other.

***7. Orienteer who has been shown repeatedly how to perform the same skill, but who continues to perform it incorrectly***

- a. Assuming that the skill is important to the preceptee's practice, the focus here is on identifying the specific cause of the performance problem. These problems may arise for many possible reasons, including the following:
- Lack of knowledge about what needs to be done
  - Lack of knowledge about how to do what needs to be done
  - Lack of motivation to perform the skill correctly
  - Obstacles (attitudinal, physical, operational, environmental, or circumstantial) that inhibit or prevent skill performance

b. Analyzing this performance problem entails sequentially investigating and attempting to resolve each potential cause; this may comprise the following:

c.

- Ask the orientee to verbally describe what the skill consists of, and clarify any misperceptions or inaccuracies.
- Ask the orientee to describe each step in performing the skill, and correct any noted inaccuracies.
- Have the orientee demonstrate the skill in a simulated setting, and correct any observed deficiencies.
- Identify obstacles (attitudinal, motivational, physical, operational, environmental, or circumstantial) that inhibit or prevent skill performance, and eliminate or minimize these obstacles. Some orientees' performance may be significantly diminished by heightened anxiety whenever they are being observed' others may be preoccupied with personal or health problems; and others may find it difficult to perform when numerous distractions, noises, or personnel surround them.

- c. If none of these factors seems to represent the root cause of the problem, an alternative teaching method, such as videotape or interactive computer-assisted instruction, or an alternate instructor (someone more their age or someone who has completed orientation more recently) may prove valuable.

**8. *Orientee who continually remarks that a former place of employment had higher and better standards of practice***

- a. This is a variant of scenario 6; the same general strategies apply here.
- b. After these strategies have been initiated, solicit the orientee's suggestions regarding where and how improvements could be made to existing practices at the agency.
- c. Attempt to channel orientees' valid and constructive input by suggesting that they keep a record of areas where improvements seem warranted, the nature of the improvements, and any literature sources available that support their suggestions. Make plans for you and the orientee to mutually present these proposals at a future staff meeting.
- d. For areas where the orientee's critique represents differences of opinion rather than legitimacy, explain (to the extent possible) how these practice standards were developed and the process available for making modifications to those standards. The orientee's comments might also be channeled into designing unit research projects to verify the better standard of practice.

**9. *Orientee who expects to be spoon-fed and resents having to assume any personal responsibility for learning***

- a. Ensure that the manager reiterates the employer's expectations regarding the orientee's responsibility to complete orientation.
- b. Reinforce this expectation when you meet with the orientee to design the learning contract that guides the preceptor program.
- c. Throughout orientation, monitor orientees' completion of their responsibilities on a regular basis, note any deficiencies, lend maximal instructional support, and keep their manager informed of any problems.
- d. If necessary, counsel the orientee regarding lack of personal responsibility first and, if this is not effective, then arrange a meeting with the orientee and the manager to discuss the issue, to further counsel the orientee, and to identify benchmarks necessary for improvement. After this meeting, the decision regarding the orientee's continued employment falls within the prerogative of the unit manager.

***10. Orientee who becomes visibly upset when his or her performance is critiqued***

- a. Share your observations related to the orientee's responses to critique of his or her performance and attempt to elicit the cause(s) of those responses.
- b. Inquire whether a modification of how, when, or where the critique is offered would minimize the orientee's response; follow these suggestions to the extent possible.
- c. Make every attempt to defuse unwarranted emotional responses by avoiding use of negative feedback, emphasizing accomplishments to date, conveying confidence in the orientee's ability to successfully complete all requirements, and judicious use of humor.

***11. Orientee who shows no concern after making a grievous or dangerous error***

- a. This is a potentially serious situation; it is paramount to identify the cause of an apparent lack of concern. Although a general strategy comparable to that used for scenario 7 is applicable, additional considerations are indicated.
  
- b. Because individuals have varying emotional expressions, and because cultural differences may affect the use of nonverbal expressions, preceptors must first verify whether their perception (that the orientee has no concern) is accurate. In many cases, an orientee's blank expression may reflect shock or embarrassment, lack of knowledge, or a desire to show control over emotions.

- c. Orientees may not comprehend the nature of their error and, consequently, have little or no appreciation for its potential sequelae. In other situations, orientees may realize that they made an error, but not fully see the potential or actual harm that could follow. Counseling these orientees will involve more instruction than admonishment.
  
- d. In rare cases, when orientees fully comprehend their error and its consequences and still display no apparent concern, the preceptor may request clarification of this discrepancy, explain the necessary follow-up activities (for example, notifying the attending physician and unit manager or completing an incident report) and their likely outcomes, distinguish the source of the error, and help orientees identify means for preventing such errors in the future. Keep in mind that some orientees may attempt to minimize their reaction to the error and hope that the preceptor will do the same. Although potentially dangerous errors cannot be concealed, reactions disproportionate to the gravity of the situation also need to be avoided.

## ***12. Orientee who complains about the quality of the preceptor's job skills***

- a. Regardless of whether these complaints were voiced directly or conveyed by third parties, the preceptor should arrange for a private meeting location to share what has been communicated with the orientee and to request clarification of the nature and extent of the perceived problems.
- b. Distinguish whether the orientee's complaints relate to the preceptor's skills as a staff nurse or as a preceptor.
- c. Attempt to isolate the specific areas in which the orientee is dissatisfied and why these are perceived as problematic.
- d. Make every attempt to avoid becoming reactive or defensive to these complaints. Try to work with the orientee to clarify areas of misunderstanding and to identify ways in which the preceptor can more effectively work with the orientee.
- e. If these activities are not successful, the preceptor can discuss these issues with the manager to determine if assignment of a different preceptor or counseling of the new employee is warranted.

*13. Orientee who is hesitant and flusters easily, fearing that he or she may make a mistake*

- a. This often represents a variant of scenarios 3 or 10, and may also occur in combination with other scenarios.
- b. Orientees who experience this problem may benefit from a more extended instructional practice time in a quiet, simulated setting where fewer variables exist to escalate their fears and anxieties. It may also be beneficial to use a more self-directed approach to instruction, such as letting orientees view videotapes and practice by themselves, before a preceptor observes their performance.
- c. This strategy can build confidence for both those who tend to underestimate their capabilities as well as those who tend to be perfectionists.

***14. Orientee who seems preoccupied with his or her personal situation***

- a. If the orientee's preoccupation with a personal situation is not affecting his or her work performance, the preceptor might provide guidance in securing any available employee family support services offered at the agency.
- b. If the orientee's preoccupation with a personal situation is affecting his or her work performance adversely, the preceptor might suggest a meeting with the manager to devise ways in which the orientee could be supported.

***15. Orientee who is experiencing difficulty in relating to his or her coworkers***

- a. Elicit both the orientee's and the staff's perspectives on the problems and issues involved, focusing on isolating the specific nature and extent of the causes and difficulties perceived by each party.
- b. Once the issues have been defined for each side, solicit suggestions from each party regarding avenues for resolving the perceived areas of conflict. Share this information candidly and openly with the other party.
- c. Convene a face-to-face meeting with the orientee and staff representatives, and attempt to arbitrate the issues and solutions suggested so that effective working relationships can be established and maintained.

Have you experienced other common problems in working with new hires not listed above?

Alspach, JoAnn. "Chapter 10." *From Staff Nurse to Preceptor: A Preceptor Development Program*. Aliso Viejo, CA: AACN Critical Care Publication, 2000. N. pag. Print.