Novice Nurses: You Hired Them But Can You Keep Them?

Stacy E. Wahl, PhD, RN-BC, CCRN
North Shore/LIJ Health Care System, New York
Walden University, Minneapolis, MN

Overview

Retention of nursing personnel is a key policy issue for healthcare organizations. Newly graduated Registered Nurses (RNs) who elect to begin their professional career in an acute hospital are assigned a period of orientation that varies in content, structure, and length of time depending on the institution and the service area of employment. Studying the role transition from novice to staff RN, Kramer coined the phrase ‘reality shock’ to describe the anxiety that resulted from being expected to function in a new role with limited knowledge and clinical experience. Research indicates that most college graduates lack the skills required for independent practice in their professional field and studies have shown that a significant percentage of these individuals will leave their first job within the first year of employment. It has been reported that novice RN’s require a full year of support and professional development post graduation to attain confidence in their role and feel comfortable performing their job. Research revealed that the most stressful period for new RN hires occurs within the first six months of employment. Given the nursing shortage, many hospitals expect new RN hires to be able to ‘hit the ground running’ without considering how lack of socialization to the workplace, and new found responsibilities and accountability demands can result in the RN feeling underprepared and overwhelmed. While the effects of “reality shock” can never be completely removed, orientation programs that address the needs of fostering competence and confidence in clinical practice coupled with socialization to the workplace can increase job satisfaction and retention. Institutions that choose to invest in the development of their employees through supportive programs and informative communication initiatives have higher levels of employee
retention, job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Armed with this knowledge, many hospitals are transitioning to orientation programs for new RN hires that employ a preceptorship model and offer peer support to novice nurses throughout the first year in professional practice.

**Research Questions and Findings**

1. There will be a statistical significance when correlating the number of preceptors new RN graduates worked with during their clinical orientation into the place of hire and their levels of personal, work, and patient burnout scores.

   **Finding:** The more preceptors new RNs were exposed to during their clinical orientation to the unit/floor of hire, the higher their personal, work, and patient burnout scores.

2. The novice RN’s age would be significantly significant when correlated with personal, work, and patient burnout scores.

   ![Table showing burnout scores by age group](image)

   **Finding:** Age was statistically significant when correlated to personal, work, and patient burnout. The younger the respondent, the higher was the burnout score.

3. The respondent’s level of education would show a statistically significant correlation with personal, work, and patient burnout scores.

   **Finding:** The level of education did not have a statistically significant correlation with personal, work, and patient burnout.
4. The respondent’s work shift would show a statistically significant correlation with personal, work, and patient burnout scores.

**Finding:** Work shift was significantly correlated with personal and patient burnout but not with work burnout.

5. There will be a statistically significant correlation between the total number of clinical orientation weeks and burnout.

**Finding:** The hypothesis was rejected. The total number of weeks spent in orientation was not statistically significant when correlated with burnout.

6. There will be a statistically significant correlation between the number of weeks orienting on the shift of hire and burnout.

**Finding:** This hypothesis was partially supported. RNs who worked the night shift had lower burnout scores when they spent more time orienting during the night shift.

7. The number of months RNs spent working on the floor/unit of hire would be correlated with burnout.

**Finding:** There was a statistically significant positive correlation of patient burnout with novice RNs who had a total of 6-8 months of experience.

**Actions for Improvement Based on Findings**

1. Dedicated and consistent one-to-one preceptor to orientee assignments.
2. Building trusting relationships
3. Foster learning experiences
4. Give continuous feedback
5. Orient staff on the shift of hire
6. Develop mentorships and monthly support group
References


