

Mentorship occurs in all domains of nursing practice and among individuals with varying levels of nursing knowledge, skill and experience. Many nurses¹ benefit from a mentoring relationship as it supports professional socialization, fosters a professional and safe work environment, supports professional growth, increases job satisfaction, improves recruitment and retention, and supports nurses to provide safe, competent, and ethical care (Edlund, 2017; Rohatinsky, Udod, Anonson, Rennie, & Jenkins, 2018; Saletnik, 2018; Schroyer, Zellers & Abraham, 2016).

While some nurses have formal mentor roles through structured mentorship programs, all nurses have a professional and ethical responsibility to engage in mentorship (Canadian Nurses Association, 2017; College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, 2013).

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the principles of mentoring in nursing, and the professional and ethical responsibilities of regulated members when engaging in a mentoring relationship.

Mentorship versus Preceptorship

The purpose of mentorship is to “assist novice and experienced individuals to develop professionally while facilitating integration within the workplace, employee engagement, job satisfaction, networking and succession planning for both individuals” (Rohatinsky et al., 2018, p.324). Mentorship focuses on a collegial relationship and can be both formal and informal. The relationship can be both short-term and long-term depending on the needs of the mentee and the mentor’s assessment; ultimately, it should be mutually beneficial to both.

The purpose of preceptorship is to “assist novice individuals to adjust to and learn a new role, become acquainted with a new work environment, and develop clinical skills in order to produce a competent, functioning employee” (Rohatinsky et al., 2018, p.324). Preceptorship focuses on an evaluative relationship and is typically formal. The length of the relationship is usually predetermined and short-term, for the primary benefit of the preceptee.

¹ The term nurse(s) refers to all regulated members of CARNA including registered nurses (RNs), graduate nurses (GNs), certified graduate nurses (CGNs), nurse practitioners (NPs), graduate nurse practitioners (GNPs), and courtesy permit holders.

The Importance of Mentoring

- A nurse's level of autonomy and proficiency develops best with collaboration and mentorship from colleagues, managers, supervisors and other members of the health-care team.
- Internationally educated nurses (IENs) benefit from guidance and direction from regulated members as they adjust to the context of the Canadian health-care system and the provision of care within it.
- Nursing students, novice nurses, IENs, those returning to practice after an absence or entering a new practice setting benefit from welcoming practice environments. Nurses who feel supported, valued, respected and nurtured will transition to practice with an increased ability to provide safe, competent, ethical nursing care.

Key Principles of Mentoring

1. Novice nurses, IENs, those returning to practice after an absence, or entering a new practice setting:
 - ◆ Require time to transition to their role, responsibilities, accountabilities, and setting.
 - ◆ Should practice to the full extent of their individual competence within the legislated scope of practice.
 - ◆ Should recognize their own limitations within their role and seek assistance when needed.
 - ◆ Need to develop their confidence, autonomy, knowledge, skills and judgement before they can mentor others, assume higher levels of responsibility or manage complex clinical situations and staffing decisions.
2. Comprehensive mentoring programs:
 - ◆ Help model safe, competent, and ethical nursing practice.
 - ◆ Support the acquisition of knowledge, skills and judgement to perform activities competently and proficiently.
 - ◆ Enable the learning of the roles and responsibilities of a nurse in their practice setting.
3. For mentoring to be successful, employers, agencies and organizations should:
 - ◆ Provide on-going education supports for regulated members who are mentors.
 - ◆ Dedicate resources and time allocation for mentorship activities.
 - ◆ Communicate the importance of mentorship among nurses.

Key Roles

Mentors

Mentorship may involve supporting and guiding nursing students, novice nurses, those who are new to nursing practice in Alberta, and/or entering a new role or practice setting. Some roles of a mentor include (Rohatinsky et al., 2018):

- assessing learning needs
- providing opportunities for learning
- socializing mentees to the workplace
- supporting mentees for professional development
- advising on work and learning opportunities
- providing psychological support and constructive feedback
- modelling professional behaviors and attitudes

Mentee

Mentorship is a mutually beneficial collegial relationship and mentees also have a role to play (Rohatinsky et al., 2018) by:

- Identifying their learning needs and goals.
- Being receptive and open to feedback from their mentors and learning.
- Recognizing their areas of limitations and seeking assistance when needed.

Responsibility and Accountability of Mentors

CARNA's *Practice Standards for Regulated Members* (2013) and the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) *Code of Ethics* (2017) provide a foundation for regulated members to understand their responsibility and accountability as mentors. Regulated members are responsible and accountable for:

- Following current legislation, standards and policies relevant to their practice setting.
- Ensuring interactions are in keeping with ethical nursing practice.
- Assessing their own practice and taking the necessary steps to improve their personal competence.
- Sharing their knowledge, providing feedback and guidance to support the professional development of nursing students, novice nurses, other nurses, and other health-care providers, specifically:

- ◆ Engaging in and supporting others in the continuing competence process.
- ◆ Encouraging ethical reflection and working to develop their own and others' awareness of ethics in practice.
- Contributing to positive and healthy practice environments and a climate of trust that supports openness, encourages the act of questioning the status quo and supports those who speak out in good faith to address concerns. Specifically this involves:
 - ◆ Treating colleagues, students, and other health-care providers in a respectful manner.
 - ◆ Resolving differences in a constructive way.
 - ◆ Refraining from any form of workplace bullying.
 - ◆ Recognizing the power differentials that may exist between mentors and mentees.
 - ◆ Maintaining professional boundaries with mentees.
 - ◆ Advocating for and contributing to establishing practice environments that have the organizational and human support systems, and the resource allocations necessary for safe, competent and ethical nursing care.

References

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