Easing the transition: preparing nursing students for practice

Final-year nursing students who undertake an employment induction programme before registration become more confident newly qualified practitioners, says Iain Burns

Summary

NHS Fife and the University of Dundee School of Nursing and Midwifery jointly offer final-year adult nursing students the opportunity to undertake an employment induction programme and apply for the nurse bank before they register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council. If successful, they are guaranteed places on a four-week paid induction programme on the nurse bank as soon as their registrations take effect. Early evaluation suggests that this opportunity helps participants to become more confident about making the transition from student to qualified practitioner.

Keywords
Nursing students, induction programmes, registration

The focus of undergraduate pre-registration nurse education programmes is to ensure that nurses are fit to practise (Nursing and Midwifery Council 2004). Newly qualified staff are generally offered an induction or mentorship programme during their first months in post, and, in Scotland, all new nurse registrants are required to enrol in the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) (2008) Flying Start NHS programme.

This development programme is web-based and designed to increase the confidence and performance of newly qualified nurses, midwives and allied health professionals during their first year of employment. It comprises ten learning units that correspond with the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF):

- Communication.
- Clinical skills.
- Teamwork.
- Safe practice.
- Research for practice.
- Equality and diversity.
- Policy.

These units provide a structure for newly qualified practitioners to formulate their personal development plans (PDPs) and supports their progress through the KSF foundation gateway.

Participants in the programme have access to ward-based mentors, whose NES-recommended input is between two and four hours a month.

The support of team members is also available to participants on a daily basis.

Preparation

Evidence suggests that newly qualified staff find the move from student to staff nurse difficult unless they have had appropriate preparation in pre-registration education linked to more formal support on starting employment (Whitehead 2001).

In response, NHS Fife Operational Division, which covers acute inpatient services in the Fife area, and the University of Dundee School of Nursing and Midwifery (SNM) have begun to offer final-year adult nursing students opportunities to undertake an induction programme for new staff and to apply for positions on the nurse bank before they have registered.

This enables them, as soon as their registration is confirmed, to engage fully in practice on the nurse bank with a view to securing permanent positions, enhancing their preparation for practice and embarking on Flying Start NHS.

By taking these opportunities, nursing students can engage in activities linked to the ‘real world’ of work, and can prepare themselves for their final practice placements and eventual roles as qualified, registered practitioners.
The induction programme takes place over three days during their final semester at SNM. With input from NHS Fife Operational Division, it covers topics such as infection control, tissue viability and spiritual care that are relevant to new nursing staff.

After completing their initial inductions, students whose applications for positions on the nurse bank have been successful are guaranteed, on receipt of their NMC registrations, four weeks of paid induction and orientation as bank staff nurses in familiar clinical settings.

Applicants usually complete this induction and orientation programme during their first three months of employment at NHS Fife.

Real, not ideal

The experience of those who make the transition from student to registered nurse, described by Kramer (1974) as a ‘reality shock’, is such that many new graduates lack confidence in taking up their qualified roles (Lauder et al 2008).

This lack of confidence contributes in turn to the high attrition rates of newly qualified nurses (Gould et al 2006).

The purpose of the new employee induction programme, therefore, is to help newly qualified staff by offering them early support from their potential employers. This ensures that they are better prepared for the ‘real’ rather than the ‘ideal’ world of nursing practice (Whitehead 2001).

By undertaking the induction programme, students can:

- Enhance their preparation for practice.
- Begin the transition from student to registered nurse.
- Join NHS Fife nurse bank as registered nurses when their registrations are complete.
- Ease the transition from bank staff nurse to a substantive post.
- Embark on the Flying Start NHS programme. The induction programme also improves the recruitment and retention of qualified staff.

There are so many initiatives to enhance preparation for practice that their formal evaluation has become essential, particularly where expansion of these initiatives is planned (Culley and Genders 2003).

Research tends to focus on initiatives that support newly qualified nurses rather than those who are about to undergo the transition from student to registered nurse (Whitehead 2001) so, in September 2007, NHS Fife launched a pilot study of the induction programme involving the January 2005 cohort of 45 adult students.

The objectives of the pilot study are to evaluate:

- Adult nursing students’ perception of how the transition from student to registered nurse affects their preparations for practice.
- Mentors’ and senior charge nurses’ experience of newly qualified staff who have completed the employment induction already.
- The need for changes to the induction programme to enhance student preparation for practice.

Participants in the pilot study have so far found the induction programme informative and useful, particularly in relation to the requirements and responsibilities of registered nurses and to where registered nurses fit in the organisation as a whole.

New nurses who had been allocated to clinical areas with which they were familiar from their practice placements particularly liked the sense of continuity offered by the programme.

Senior charge nurses have commented that early induction makes the transition from student to registered nurse easier, and one clinical area has offered two newly qualified nurses substantive posts at the end of their orientation periods.

The pilot study has now been expanded to include September 2005 and January 2006 adult student cohorts. The full report is due to be published by December 2009 but, in the meantime, interim reports on the pilot study are being provided to the appropriate staff as each element is completed.

Implications for practice

Investment in the undergraduate nursing programme by NHS practice development staff can enhance the transition from student to staff nurse with the potential to improve service delivery.

Further reading

Flying Start NHS programme activities are available at www.flyingstart.scot.nhs.uk

References


Nursing and Midwifery Council (2004) Standards of Proficiency for Pre-Registration Nursing Education. NMC, London.


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