Nurse educators and leaders understand the importance of an effective orientation for new graduate nurses, and the additional challenge of on-boarding the novice nurse into specialty units such as critical care. Graduate nurses can be overwhelmed with the complexities of a highly acute environment, and the multifaceted needs of its patient population. Nurses in a Critical Care Unit in a Community Hospital recognized through their poor retention rate that their current method of orienting the new graduate nurse was not effective. After reviewing feedback from previous new hires and completing a literature search for best practice, the nurses formed a committee to evaluate their current process and develop a new orientation. Using a structured process which included bi-weekly meetings with the new graduate, preceptor, manager, educator and a committee member, the orientation progressed through stages with assigned competency completion. Staff nurses also participated by providing didactic educational sessions on critical care topics. The outcome was 100% retention of the new graduate nurses and successful competency validation. This staff driven orientation facilitated the transition from new graduate to professional nurse and assisted in the retention of qualified nurses and ultimately safe patient care.

**Solving the Preceptor Problem**

- In collaboration with our Nurse Manager, we chose the strongest preceptors and paired them with the incoming Graduate Nurses.
- Each Graduate Nurse was given a primary preceptor and a back-up secondary preceptor to ensure the primary preceptor was available.
- A preceptor-Graduate Nurse relationship was found to be less than optimal; a new primary preceptor was chosen after discussion with the Nurse Manager, Education Champion, current primary preceptor, Graduate Nurse, and Nurse Educator.

**Solving the Consistency/Structure Problem**

- We reviewed the research and found evidence supporting the new graduate’s need for consistency, structure, and socialization as well as the importance of the preceptor and the manager in the orientation process.
- We studied the successful programs developed at a different facility and adapted it to the needs of our Critical Care Unit.

**How can we transform our current critical care unit orientation process to improve novice nurse retention?**

We identified the problems with our previous orientation program which resulted in a one-year graduated nurse retention rate of 0%.

### Preceptor Consistency

Because the Graduate Nurse may be with several different preceptors during their orientation, relationships were difficult to develop, and it was hard to keep track of their progress.

### Structure of the Orientation

Inconsistency and lack of structure lead to the Graduate Nurse feeling unprepared.

In the past, there was no set way to discuss the Graduate Nurse’s progression through orientation or to assess their learning needs. Orientation was also a “one size fits all” concept. We decided that we needed to review each Graduate Nurse’s progress more frequently and personalize orientation to each individual.

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**Checklists and Critical Care Courses**

- Staff-driven
- Current evidence based curriculum
- Competency assessed
- Self-paced learning
- Critical thinking-oriented
- Preceptor driven
- Critical Care Orientation Plan