Background

As institutions grow in size and complexity, the onboarding process becomes increasingly more challenging. How can NPD specialists effectively identify the needs of nurse preceptors and determine if their needs are being met?

From October 2013 to March 2014, Texas Children’s Hospital hired 228 new nurses and there were 102 internal transfers. Preceptors were busy! Recognizing the valuable link between talented preceptors and competent, confident new nurses, preceptors were provided with several recognition events and developmental offerings during this time.

With the increased hiring, the annual Preceptor Survey became an even more important source of data that, along with the annual New Nurse Survey, provides us with two perspectives to evaluate the preceptor program.

Objective

Completion of this activity will enable the learner to:
Examine a method to engage both preceptors and recently hired nurses in the process of evaluating a preceptor program.

Methods

Preceptor Survey

Annually, preceptors are asked to complete an online survey. The questions vary slightly from year to year depending on recent initiatives, but standard questions include:
- Understanding of the preceptor role
- Ability to apply knowledge learned
- Confidence in role
- Satisfaction with role
- Support from leadership team
- Performance feedback received
- Recognition of role
- Future learning needs

The 2014 Preceptor Survey included questions evaluating the achievement of learning objectives from an online preceptor “refresh” educational offering, knowledge learned and ability to apply it from several developmental offerings with an outside consultant, support received from leadership team to attend developmental offerings, and streamlining of the orientation paperwork.

The link to the survey is provided to preceptors in online newsletter. In 2014, there were 125 responses of 310 preceptors = 40% return rate. Aggregate and individual department results are shared with nursing leaders.

New Nurse Survey

Annually in December, every permanent staff nurse hired that year is asked to complete an online New Nurse Survey with questions about various aspects of their onboarding process including:
- If they participated in the Nurse Residency Program
- The centralized clinical orientation class effectively introduced them to the shared clinical competencies
- The centralized Nursing Orientation class effectively introduced them to the professional practice of nursing at TCH
- Their orientation prepared them for their job responsibilities
- Their primary preceptor(s) provided encouragement and feedback about their work
- Their primary preceptor(s) made them feel part of the team
- Their educator provided feedback and encouragement about their work
- What can be done to improve the orientation process?

The survey link was e-mailed to 394 nurses hired in calendar year 2014. 208 responses were received = 53% return rate. Aggregate and individual department results are shared with nursing leaders.

Results

Preceptor Survey 2014

- Initial curriculum provided clear understanding of role: 85%
- Receive support from unit leadership to attend development offerings: 80%
- Feel confident in abilities as a preceptor: 90%
- Satisfied with role as a preceptor: 82%
- Interested in precepting in the future: 90%
- Feel contributions as a preceptor are recognized: 82%
- Receive support from unit leadership to do job as preceptor: 63%
- Receive ongoing performance feedback from educator: 62%
- Receive annual performance feedback from educator: 65%

Questions relating to preceptors:
- When asked what they were able to apply from the initial curriculum while precepting, top subjects reported:
  - Feedback/communication/conflict resolution
  - Learning styles
  - Adult learning principles
  - Assessing learning needs
- Additional learning needs identified by preceptors included:
  - Objectively documenting when my orientee is experiencing challenges
  - Creating an action plan when my orientee is experiencing challenges
  - Discussing legal aspects of precepting
  - Developing strategies to enhance critical thinking skills of orientees

New Nurse Survey 2014

Questions relating to preceptors:

- Orientation prepared them for their job responsibilities: 84%
- Primary preceptor(s) provided encouragement and feedback about their work: 85%
- Primary preceptor(s) made them feel part of the team: 85%

Questions relating to new nurses:

- What was the single most important thing that you gained during your onboarding process? (Top 5 responses for each)

Implications

Improving onboarding processes can lead to increased staff satisfaction and retention. Preceptors are in the unique position of fulfilling the role of a new nurse’s teacher, role model, evaluator, and advocate. It is a great responsibility that if done well, results in the new nurse becoming a confident, competent member of the team.

Based on survey results and collaboration with decentralized educators and other nursing leaders, we focused on several opportunities:
- Increased awareness among nursing leaders about preceptor program requirements and importance of initial preceptor training and ongoing development.
- Addressed preceptors’ identified learning needs through enhancements to the initial preceptor curriculum and “Preceptor Cafés.” Supporting preceptors’ time for development continues to be a challenge.
- Emphasized the need for performance feedback for preceptors by their educators and for new nurses by their preceptors.

Both of these surveys are administered annually and contain standard questions which allow us to see improvements or challenges in the orientation processes. Obtaining data from the preceptors and recently hired nurses provides us with perspectives from both sides of the onboarding process and allows us to continually check the pulse of the preceptors.

References: