

Impact of Professional Identity on Transition to Practice

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Professional Identity in nursing continues to be at the forefront as a nursing initiative. As work continues to develop through engagement and reflection, nurses are beginning to embrace the history, characteristics, and values of the discipline as we align thinking, acting, and feeling like a nurse. This is influenced by one's character both independently and collaboratively, which forms due to unique individualities, backgrounds, perspectives, and voices. Keep in mind, this formation is not a linear process, but one that responds to challenges and matures through our experiences, thus developing confidence in the nursing profession, which allows us to flourish. Let us explore the importance of Professional Identity and its four domains as a foundation on the journey of transition to practice.

Understanding the Gap

Criticality of new nurse transition to practice is well documented in literature. Unprecedented global changes during the COVID-19 pandemic heightened our awareness and magnified the need for support at all entry levels across the profession (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2021). Patient care continues to grow in complexity because of increased acuity, shortened hospital days, enhancements in technology, increase of regulatory standards, and an intense focus on metrics for quality and safety. The totality of these leads to our current reality of new nurses causes them to become disillusioned and leave the profession within their first year. During the first few days and weeks, the novice nurse experiences fear, anxiety, stress, and, in some cases, despair. This transitional time is essential for nurses to develop the skills, attitudes, and confi-



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dence needed for autonomous nursing care. Findings support new graduate registered nurses continue to have high levels of turnover due to stress, lack of support, and inadequate preparation both at the academia and practice levels. A successful transition relies on educational preparation, support of educators, orientation to the hospital, healthy workplace culture/environment, and organizational support. Faculty have many formal and informal opportunities to mentor, facilitate, guide, and support students as they seek out work environments that will best promote the development of their professional nursing identity.

Background to Transition to Practice

For nurses to flourish in transition to practice, programs must be developed which offer additional support and competency development to support retention of nurses. This programming starts in the academic realm, setting the stage for the shift from student to nurse. Faculty involvement is crucial to catapulting students into practice. This includes classroom, clinical experiences, simulation,

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and advising. Emphasis for this transition should focus on workload, gaps in knowledge, communication, expectations, role evolution, healthy work environment, and organizational culture.

As a result of the ongoing need for support, Nurse Residency Programs (NRPs) were built in both formal and informal hospital programs (Spector & Echternacht, 2010). The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) reports a marked decrease in attrition, as well as improved patient outcomes with the use of residency programs. As a result, they have now completed a two-phase randomized multisite study, which concluded these programs lead to less stress, increased job satisfaction, increased patient safety, and increased retention. Additionally, they support the International Center for Regulatory Scholarship (ICRS) five module online program for transition to practice, as well as a module course specific for preceptors.

While several programs are available, two well-established programs are the Versant New Graduate Residency Program and the Vizient American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Nurse Residency Program. Both emphasize the importance of standardized and evidence-based processes to improve job satisfaction and retention, further supported in the *Future of Nursing Report* by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommendation (IOM, 2010).

It is increasingly clear that the importance of embedding concepts of professional identity as a core nursing competency from the first moment the student enters the classroom and as ongoing assistance to help them connects the dots between curriculum and practice, ensuring continued interconnectedness. To continue the work of professional identity, in April 2021, AACN approved the new Essentials, introducing 10 domains (AACN, 2021) reflecting on the unique diversity of a skilled, collegiate nursing workforce with marketable degrees (Godfrey, 2022). This gives guidance for all faculty to incorporate as key concepts in curriculum development.

Creating Success in Transition to Practice

As we evolve and incorporate professional identity into nursing, the direct and indirect impacts educators have on the success of the individual student are clear. This influence goes far beyond just classroom experiences and includes clinical experience as well as simulation. By teaching the core components in this

article, faculty can provide guidance about opportunities within transition to practice. This can be effectively taught in individual and group venues, and must include support, expectations, and validation, while allowing for vulnerability without shaming.

Nurses may not feel they have a voice in decisions and/or operations of their organization. They desire the ability to apply professional knowledge to patient care and clinical decision-making within the scope of their licensure. Identity formation assists nurses to help establish the value and principles that guide this process. As a result, organizations initiated Shared Governance (Kroning, & Hopkins, 2019) as a critical pathway to ensure nurses have an avenue for their voices to be heard. Inclusion in this governance structure indicates engaged stakeholders and emotional intelligence, leading nurses to no longer feel like they are renters in their profession but have evolved into homeowners. Faculty must incorporate open discussions and applicable scenarios with students to ensure they understand and embrace empowerment of this process for successful integration upon transitioning to the work environment.

Some strategies faculty can instill in students include:

- It's ok to not know everything – You are a novice, talk through your anxiety, develop patience for yourself and others.
- Every opportunity is a learning moment – Observe, take notes, orient yourself, use all available resources.
- Ask questions – Never assume, clarity is crucial.
- Request help – Don't hesitate, think patient safety.
- Prioritize – What is critical? What can you delegate?
- Communication – Be clear and concise, listen to experiences, connect with others.
- Trust your struggles – Great things take time, recharge your batteries, well-being is essential.
- Be courageous – Step out of your comfort zone.
- Feedback – Giving and receiving in a constructive manner.
- Mentors – Seek them out.

Another critical component revolves around setting the stage for a positive work culture. "It has been identified new graduate nurses are particularly vulnerable in unsupportive practice environments" (Rudman & Gustavsson, 2011 pg

292). Negative work environments can lead to self-harm, alcohol/drug abuse, illegal activity, and potentially suicide. Workplace culture deeply impacts satisfaction, productivity, experience, and organizational loyalty. Ensuring students understand components of a positive work environment include compassion, kindness, understanding boundaries of horizontal/lateral violence, and the importance of skillful communication are key teaching points. By giving students this skill set, they will feel empowered, fulfilled, and surrounded by a community of practice that encapsulates a positive work environment.

Principles guide our values, ethics, and practice which is at the core of the nursing profession. Nurses are identified as one of the most trusted individuals in the United States (Gallup, January 2022) aligning well with domain 9 in the Essentials, which is centered around ethics, the nurse's presence, and ability to navigate, and assist their patient and advocate for equitable understanding and inclusion of distribution of resources to those they work with and serve. (AACN, 2021 p.49)

Students need to learn how to say what needs to be said clearly and effectively, know when to say it, and how to use correct avenues to provide quality care for their patients while ensuring clear professional boundaries.

Advocating for social justice and health equity, including addressing the health of vulnerable populations, is an accountability the nurse will need to understand. This leads to the ability to advocate with moral courage, develop an awareness of professional boundaries, and effectively work within various diverse communities. The National Commission to Address Racism states assaults on the human spirit in forms of actions, biases, prejudices, or an ideology of superiority based on race persistently cause moral suffering and physical harm of individuals and perpetuate system injustices and inequities (American Nurses Association, 2022). Once again, faculty have an opportunity to address this important skillset not only in the classroom and clinical settings, but also through simulation in a safe environment to decrease vulnerability.

Closing

How will you be a positive part of this initiative? Nursing continues to change, grow, and evolve at an exponential rate in both academia and practice. There is no greater accomplishment than developing the next generation of nurses while instilling cornerstones for success through best practices, which include proficiency of skill sets, improved clinical competence, attention to emotional needs, and retention of the new graduate nurse. David Leach once stated, "Authentic leaders are not made nor are they born; they are enabled or disabled by the organizations in which they work." Academia and practice must continue to bridge the gap and work together to enable the next generation of nurse as leaders to excel in their work environments. We must continue to partner together to rise to the challenge and interperse professional identity in every corner of our education and practice. **DN**

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NSNA Leadership University Honor Society

This is an exciting time to have your students join or renew their membership in National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA). All NSNA members are invited to launch their Professional Identity Formation in Nursing through participation in the NSNA Leadership University Honor Society. Students enroll in the Honor Society by participating in leadership at the school, state, or national level. By serving in a leadership position (i.e., elected or appointed to the Board of Directors, chapter committees, and participation in projects/activities as determined by your chapter), and attending state association and NSNA virtual and/or live meetings, students will qualify. School chapters must have a minimum of 10 members and be eligible for official NSNA constituency status (renewed annually) for chapter leaders to enroll in the Honor Society.

All NSNA members are eligible – there are no additional dues required.

Professional Identity Formation in Nursing

"A sense of oneself, and in relation to others, that is influenced by characteristics, norms, and values of the Nursing discipline, resulting in an individual thinking, acting, and feeling like a nurse."

(Definition of Professional Identity in Nursing adopted by the International



Society for Professional Identity in Nursing, September 2019. © 2022 University of Kansas/ISPIN)

The NSNA Leadership University Honor Society accelerates the formation of professional identity in nursing. Nursing school is the beginning of a student's leadership journey that will advance their career and contribute to the advancement of the nursing profession. NSNA provides numerous opportunities for students to learn about the many facets of the nursing profession, including Population and Global Health, Breakthrough to Nursing (recruitment into the profession), Ethics and Governance, Health Policy and Advocacy, Image of Nursing, and governing a school chapter, state association, and national

organization. Through these programs, social justice, social determinants of health, diversity, equity, and inclusion will contribute to the advancement of nursing's social mission and are integrated into professional identity.

Think, Act, and Feel Like a Nurse

The signposts of Professional Identity in Nursing include Values and Ethics, Nurse as Leader, Knowledge, and Professional Competence.* By practicing leadership in nursing school, students apply and integrate learning to build self-confidence and knowledge. They will be better prepared to think, act, and feel like a professional nurse, and to transition into nursing practice and leadership roles as a new graduate registered nurse.

All Honor Society members receive a certificate of recognition and patch for their participation. Additionally, they may purchase a special Leadership University Honor Society graduation cord and pin. Visit www.nsnaleadershipu.org for complete information.

*NSNA is collaborating with **Nelda Godfrey, PhD, ACNS-BC, RN, FAAN, ANEF**, Professor and Associate Dean, Innovative Partnerships and Practice, University of Kansas School of Nursing, Kansas City, Kansas, and The International Society for Professional Identity in Nursing work group led by **Debra Liebig** and **Anne Weybrew**. **DN**

Volume 44, No. 2 • Fall 2022

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DEAN'S Notes is indexed in Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health Literature.

DEAN'S Notes is published four times a year (winter, spring, summer, and fall) by Anthony J. Jannetti Inc., East Holly Avenue, Box 56, Pitman, New Jersey 08071-0056. Telephone 856.256.2300. FAX 856.589.7463. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the express written permission of the publisher. Address changes should include mailing label and be forwarded to the publisher.

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