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THE LEARNING NEEDS OF NEWLY LICENSED REGISTERED NURSES

Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Bachelor of Science in Nursing
In the College of Health and Human Services
at Salem State University

By

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The Honors Program
Salem State University
2016

ACKNOWLEGMENTS

I would like to thank my faculty advisor Hannah Fraley for all of your support. Your guidance and encouragement gave me the confidence to research a topic that I am truly passionate about. I would also like to thank the participants for being so open and honest when sharing your experiences with me.

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ABSTRACT

Nurses are on the frontline of healthcare delivery. The learning needs of newly licensed registered nurses are poorly understood. The aim of this study is to identify the specific learning needs of these newly licensed nurses so that they are able to confidently provide excellent care to culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse patients.

A qualitative approach was used to complete this study. Convenience sampling was used to recruit ten newly licensed registered nurses who were interviewed by phone. The interviews were transcribed. Questions targeted working nurses experiences with nursing skills, interdisciplinary interactions, and documentation. Data was analyzed and coded for the identification of themes.

Gaps in the literature exist regarding the specific learning needs of newly licensed registered nurses. Understanding their learning needs can provide insight into how to better transition student nurses to registered nurses so that they are able to adequately and safely take care of a diverse patient population and work successfully as new nurses.
Keywords: newly licensed registered nurses, learning needs, delegation, interdisciplinary communication, multiple patient assignments, documentation

INTRODUCTION

The learning needs of new graduate nurses are poorly understood. Newly licensed nurses are often placed in unfamiliar settings with new roles and new responsibilities. Although some hospital orientation programs improve nurse's transition to practicing registered nurse, research is still needed to fully understand their specific learning needs at this crucial time in their careers.

The purpose of the study was to identify the learning needs of new graduate nurses who recently graduated from Salem State University (SSU). Furthermore, the author sought to examine some of the specific learning needs of new graduate nurses reflecting on their first jobs as nurses and their perceptions of what would have helped to ease their transition from student nurse to practicing registered nurse. This study identifies major areas that need focus for these new graduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many new graduate nurses experience a great amount of stress and anxiety in their first few months as new nurses (Duchscher, 2009). This is because many of them are not fully prepared when they first enter the nursing field and experience what is described as "transition shock" (Duchscher, 2009, p.1104). Transition shock refers to what new nurses can experience when transitioning from student nurse to the role of the professional practicing nurse (Duchscher, 2009). According to Duchscher (2009), many new graduate nurses experience discrepancies between what they learn and understand in nursing school and what is actually done in the real world as nurses. Julian (2013) states, "new graduate nurses lack the essential clinical skills and experience that they need to be successful and independent nurses" (Julian, 2013, p. 1). In order for them to provide safe and adequate care to their patients, it is important to identify their specific learning needs so that new nurses can be properly prepared for their first jobs as

registered nurses. According to Mariani (2012), “a smooth transition to practice is important to the success of nursing students and new-to-practice registered nurses” (Mariani, 2012, p. 4).

This literature review revealed that the first year turnover rate for bedside nurses is relatively high, and close to one million nurses are expected to reach retirement age in the next ten to fifteen years (Spiva et al., 2013). This could lead to a serious decrease in the quality of patient care. If newly licensed nurses have a better transition experience in their first few months as practicing registered nurses, this could lead to a decrease in turnover rates and nursing shortages. Hospitals would then be better staffed with more confident, knowledgeable nurses who have the ability to give high quality care to patients.

Research indicates that new graduate nurses are entering the work force as licensed registered nurses very quickly, where they are often faced with responsibilities that go beyond their abilities and experience levels (Dyess et al, 2009). This issue is only worsened by “the rising acuity of today’s hospital patients, reduced lengths in stay, staffing shortages, and complex new technologies (Dyess et al, 2009, p. 403).” Both experienced nurses and newly licensed nurses themselves are concerned about their ability to provide safe and competent care that is demanded of them as they begin their first jobs as nurses (Dyess et al., 2009). It is clear that successful transitions for these newly licensed nurses is crucial in the chaotic environment that exists in hospitals around the country today.

Along with taking care of high acuity patients and working with complex new technology, newly licensed nurses are facing other challenges as well. This includes generational differences and incivility from more experienced colleagues (Mariani, 2012). Newly licensed nurses are already concerned and anxious when beginning their careers about their ability to provide the care that is expected of them, yet many of them must also deal with communicating

with very experienced, and sometimes unfriendly, coworkers who are unwilling to help. Nurses' "eating their young" is unfortunately a concept that is still relevant today (Mariani, 2012). In order to understand the learning needs of new nurses, it is crucial that novice nurses are supported through their transition to practice by other more experienced registered nurses and nurse leaders. With support from their colleagues, they are more likely to be successful and have the confidence they need.

According to Saintsing (2011), newly practicing nurses are at a high risk for making errors compared to experienced nurses. Common errors made by novice nurses include medication errors and not following physicians' orders correctly or in a timely manner, which can often lead to incidents such as patient falls (Saintsing, 2011). It is important for nursing leaders to be aware of these common errors made by novice nurses and to realize that they are already going through a challenging time during their transition to the professional role of registered nurse. If their learning needs are identified and known beforehand, early interventions can be made and these errors may be decreased significantly and the quality of patient care would increase drastically.

In a study, which focused on transition programs for newly licensed nurses, it is stated that patient populations are continuously becoming older, sicker, and more diverse (Spector et al, 2015). As healthcare is becoming more complex, medical errors made by novice nurses are increasing (Spector et al, 2015). According to Spector et al (2015), newly licensed nurses who were in established transition to practice programs had fewer negative safety practices and had higher competence levels compared to those in hospitals with limited onboarding experience. This illuminates the fact that well established, evidence-based transition programs provide more support to new graduates and may lead to better outcomes. Identifying learning needs of new

graduate nurses would improve transition programs by identifying what areas to focus on within nursing preparation programs.

According to Straus (2009), creative ways to retain nurses are needed to deal with the nursing shortage that is expected to grow. This literature review sheds light on the programming needs for new graduate nurses. Along with increased support, it is crucial to identify their learning needs so that newly licensed nurses are less stressed. In order for a transition program to be successful, new graduate nurses "must be supported not only in their clinical development, but also in their socialization and role development (Straus, 2009, p. 219)." They need the right transition program along with healthy, supportive mentorship rather than a condescending work environment.

METHODS

Prior to data collection, this research project was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Salem State University (SSU). The study was conducted between May 2015 and November 2015. A qualitative approach was used to understand the perceptions of new graduate nurses and their learning needs during the transition from student to practicing nurse. Convenience sampling was used to recruit a sample of newly licensed registered nurses who recently graduated from Salem State University in 2013, 2014, and 2015 until data saturation was reached (N=10). Participants were interviewed over the phone using a question interview guide and the data was transcribed. Interviews lasted from 20 to 30 minutes. The questions included perceptions of the working nurses' experiences and confidence with nursing skills, interdisciplinary interactions, and documentation. Data was analyzed by using a thematic coding method. Common themes that emerged from the data were identified.

RESULTS

Common themes emerged through interviewing participants regarding their perceptions of their specific learning needs as new graduates nurses and their experiences during their transition to practice. Data from the interviews provided information from ten registered nurses who are alumni of Salem State University and are currently working as registered nurses. Of the ten participants, two work as medical-surgical nurses, two work as ICU nurses, two work in rehabilitation settings, one nurse works on a neurology floor, one nurse works on a cardiac step down unit, and one works as an orthopedic nurse. Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data: 1) difficulty handling multiple patient assignments; 2) desire for more experience with intravenous medication administration; 3) difficulty with documentation and writing nursing notes; and 4) difficulty interacting with coworkers. Difficulty Handling Multiple Patient Assignments

Difficulty Handling Multiple Patient Assignments

The first theme that emerged was difficulty handling multiple patient assignments. When asked about the most challenging part of their shift, nearly all participants mentioned that medicating and taking care of several patients was a huge challenge for them (N= 8/10). One participant stated,

> "It's tough having five patients. In clinical, we would only medicate one or two patients in a day."

Many participants stated that having a different number of patients each day at work can be difficult, as well as having admissions and discharges at the same time (N= 8/10). Participants discussed having trouble prioritizing what needed to be done and managing their time (N= 8/10).

Desire For More Intravenous Medication Administration

Another theme that surfaced from the respondents was the desire to have had more experience with administering intravenous medications. When asked about skills they wished to have known before starting their first jobs as nurses, many participants stated that they wished they had more experience with priming, hanging, and administering intravenous medications in school (N= 7/10). One participant stated,

> "I just wish that I had more experience with them. That definitely would have helped me".

It seemed that all participants had hung an IV medication at some point, but did not have the experience with it that they needed to feel comfortable as they entered their first jobs as nurses.

Difficulty With Documentation and Writing Nursing Notes

Another important theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that a majority of participants found difficulty in documenting patient information and writing nursing notes (N= 6/10). One participant stated,

> " I was very nervous because I rarely did them while I was in school. I've had to pick it up from other nurses".

Another reported,

> "The hardest part is including what is important that happened and leaving out the irrelevant details".

It is clear that nearly all participants find documenting information and writing nurses notes to be a weakness in their skill set as new nurses. Several participants mentioned having other nurses look over their notes at the end of the shift to get their feedback. One participant found that the documentation she is expected to perform at work is completely different from what she learned in her clinical rotations during nursing school.

Difficulty Interacting With Coworkers

Lastly, a theme emerged regarding having difficulty interacting with other members of their multidisciplinary team as new nurses. Some participants faced more difficulty delegating to certified nursing assistants, where as others had more difficulty reporting and speaking with physicians. A majority of new nurses described physicians as intimidating and difficult to work with (N= 6/10). A few of the participants expressed having difficulty delegating to nursing assistants because they had worked alongside some of them before becoming registered nurses (N= 3/10). One participant reported,

"At one point, I would end up doing the work because I felt so uncomfortable asking the CNA to do it."

This emphasizes the inadequate preparation in nursing school for how to delegate and supervise, which is a critical role of a registered nurse.

DISCUSSION

In spite of the difficulties reported, participants expressed happiness to be in the nursing field and taking care of patients. Half of them emphasized the importance of asking questions (N= 5/10). One participant stated,

"New nurses should go in with confidence and an open mind. Things are going to get overwhelming and scary, but you need to know you're not alone. Asking questions is simply the best way to learn".

The results of this research show that newly licensed registered nurses are not entirely prepared when first entering the nursing field. As mentioned earlier, "new graduate nurses lack the essential clinical skills and experience that they need to be successful and independent

nurses" (Julian, 2013, p. 1). The participants' responses validate this statement. Nearly all participants mentioned a need for more practice administering intravenous medications, documenting patient information, and delegating to other interdisciplinary members; all of which are crucial skills necessary to be successful as a nurse.

Although the literature stated that there is an issue of more experienced nurses being unfriendly and unhelpful towards new nurses (Mariani, 2012), the results of the study do not reflect this. None of the participants reported having any trouble interacting with experienced nurses or asking for their help. The participants found more difficulty interacting with physicians and nursing assistants. Three participants had trouble delegating to nursing assistants and six participants had difficulty interacting with doctors. This is most likely the result of being inadequately prepared during nursing school for delegating, supervising, and interacting with multidisciplinary team members. This highlights the importance of providing nursing students with the opportunities to practice these skills in a clinical setting.

This study is important for both patients and those who are in the nursing field. The results of this study indicates some specific learning needs that would help newly licensed registered nurses to be more knowledgeable, efficient, and successful. It would also help them to prevent making errors while working in the field. By creating successful and independent nurses, this would lead to better quality care for the patients. By tending to these specific learning needs, there will be better patient care and less errors.

STRENGTHS/LIMITATIONS

This study describes the lived experiences of newly licensed registered nurses. This is the first step in understanding learning needs of new nurses. The findings of this research study should not be generalized. The interviews were conducted with a small sample consisting of

female participants, and all graduated from the University nursing program. A comparable study with a larger and more diverse sample that includes the voices of males would be appropriate. Furthermore, replicating the study with participants from a broader base of nursing programs would provide more robust information. This study includes self-reported data, however provides rich insight into understanding the learning needs of new nurses from new nurses themselves.

CONCLUSION

This study set the framework for future study. Based on the main findings and themes identified, newly licensed registered nurses have several learning needs. The identified learning needs can be considered gaps in their undergraduate nursing program preparation, and are important to inform schools of nursing in programming goal revisions and curriculum planning. By closing learning needs gaps of new graduate nurses, patients will experience safer, better quality care. Study results also reveal that learning needs of new graduate nurses can be addressed and further explored, either in nursing school or in a new graduate transition program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Two of the ten participants mentioned meeting once a week with a group of new graduate nurses who were all working at the same facility. They expressed that this was very helpful and gave them the opportunity to discuss their experiences in a comfortable setting. This may benefit new nurses and reduce their stress.

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Strauss, M. B. (2009). Easing the transition: A successful new graduate program. *Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, 40* (5), 216-220. doi:10.3928/00220124-20090422-06

Mariani, B. (2012). Our ethical responsibility in the transition to practice for new RNs. *Pennsylvania Nurse, 67* (2), 4-7.

APPENDIX

Literature Table

First Author (year)	Study Design or paper aim/purpose	Theoretical/conceptual framework (if mentioned) or identified policy	Location, Target population of analysis	Identified Themes	Identified Problems	Results / Discussion as presented by authors, or discussed in their literature reviews
Duscher (2008)	-Literature review -Qualitative Study to determine the transition experiences of new graduate nurses from student nurse to professional nurse -Used semi-structured interviews	-Theoretical framework of initial role transition for new grad nurses	-Conducted interviews with 15 new graduate nurses about their experiences transitioning from student nurse to professional nurse -Participants completed pre-interview questionnaires and submitted monthly journals with details of their experiences	-New graduate nurses felt anxiety and stress during their transition	-New grad nurses could not reach out to senior counterparts because they had an equally heavy workload - Lack of formal feedback from senior colleagues - Unclear expectations of new grads -Lack of support causing stress and anxiety in new grads	-the first 3-4 months new grads experience a "transition shock" - it is a process of adjustment - this theory suggests a prep course for senior students about role transition
Dyess et al. (2009)	-Qualitative study -novice nurse leadership institute, one year program -pre and post program focus groups - aim was to better understand new graduate nurse's learning needs and transition experiences -used semi-structured questions : 1. how would you describe yourself as a new nurse?	None identified	-First three classes of NNLI included 81 participants -new graduate nurses who all have less than 12 months of experience -Mean age of nurses is 32 years - All graduated with either a baccalaureate or associates degree	-Factors that contribute to the dynamic transition and learning needs of new graduate nurses: rapid deployment, cost-containment efforts, increasing patient acuity, chaotic practice environments	-New nurses felt both fear and confidence, nervous to be the one responsible - Sometimes had difficulty communicating with interdisciplinary team members (physicians, aids) -Many nurses felt a lack of support, felt "alone" and overwhelmed - little time to make important clinical judgments -Receiving contradictory information/	-Important for new grad nurses to have opportunities to meet with each other and nurse leaders in their first year working -focus new grad nurses on positive aspects of the nursing profession -new graduate transition programs should include in their curriculum: communication, safety, specialty training , clinical reasoning, delegating/supervising, role socialization, research use

	2. What are some of the best and worst things about being a nurse? 3. describe your typical workday.				viewpoints from colleages	
Julian	-suggestions to promote smooth transitions for new graduate nurses -suggestions for both new graduate nurses and veteran nurses	None identified	-Not a research study, but rather a brief list of suggestions to promote a smooth transition for new grads	-both new grad nurses and veteran nurses share a responsibility to make the transition smooth for new grads	-new graduate nurse's needs for resources and support can persist for as long as a year to develop skills and confidence needed to be a successful nurse	
Mariani (2012)	-Explains that new-to-practice nurses have a responsibility to be true to the Code of Ethics for Nurses -Experienced RNs have an ethical responsibility to respect and mentor new graduate nurses and ease their transition	None Identified	-New-to-practice RNs -Experienced or veteran RNs	-several factors that apply to new grad transition to practice: acuity of patients, new technology, limited resources (these are out of the control of the nursing profession) -Open and effective communication is needed for a smooth transition -trust, fair treatment,	--turnover rate is 14%, many nurses leaving in the early years of their career -- lateral violence exists in the workplace, often leads to their leaving the workplace	--new grad nurses and experienced RNs have a responsibility to work together to provide quality care to patients -code of ethics for nurses outlines: collegiality, delegation, accountability, clinical judgment (crucial for both new nurses and experienced RNs for a successful transition to practice and optimal care)

				compassion, and respect are needed -understanding of multiple generations		
Saintsing et al. (2011)	Aim: to identify the most common types of errors made by new nurses in their first few years when faced with clinical decision making -to understand why these errors are made and what can be done to prevent these errors from occurring	None Identified	-New graduate nurses	-medication errors, patient falls and delay of care are the most prevalent errors made by new nurses -assigned more patients than they had during clinical training (workload and time pressures) -lack of critical thinking skills -new nurses, unexperienced	-preceptor availability, peer pressure, and first time experiences (all contribute to errors) -stress and lack of confidence in new grads may lead to errors	-transition courses and other educational interventions may need to specifically focus on error potential to raise awareness among new nurses (this may reduce error rates and improve overall patient safety)
Spiva (2013**)**	Qualitative-used convenience sample of NLRNs (newly licensed registered nurses) -audio recordings of interviews were transcribed		-21 NLRNs- 20 women and one man -all working in the 633 bed acute care hospital	Main themes: -preceptor either hindered or enhanced NLRNs progression - learning through experience, confidence came with time - preceptor, unit, and peer support eased transition -	-NLRNs did not feel like they were being given adequate feedback - were unsure of what they were being judged on -did not have a good idea about how they were doing -they were not able to judge how they were performing -Suggested more consistent and timely feedback and	-NLRNs reported a more positive transition when they had a preceptor who provided support, feedback, supervised training, guidance, and continued mentorship -exhibited emotional exhaustion when paired with a preceptor who corrected in a punitive manner in front of patients, families, or peers; did not give timely feedback, and were expected to practice independently - skills and confidence came with time and experience

Strauss (2009)	Purpose- to describe a medical surgical new graduate nursing program at Winchester Hospital -serves as foundation for succession planning for RNs in this organization	-12 week program (clinical and didactic components)	-New graduate nurses working at Winchester Hospital -80%-100% are former Winchester Hospital clinical associates	-Nursing shortage is expected to grow, using new graduate nurses is a way to solve this issue --New graduate nurses need support in clinical development, socialization, and role development	-Not enough adequate feedback -Program felt too much like school -Classroom days too long -Not enough "conversation time"	-Structured new graduate nursing program has been proven to retain new graduate nurses -New graduate nurses need support in clinical development, socialization, and role development -True measure of success is retention rates for new graduate nurses
Spector et al. (2015)	Aim- to examine quality and safety, stress, competence, job satisfaction, and retention in new graduate nursing using TTP study program - compare outcomes with a control group of hospitals that had pre-existing on boarding programs - obtain diverse sample of hospitals that range in size -survey questionnaires completed by nurses four times during year (baseline, 6,9, 12 months) these surveys included demographic and work characteristics and measures of	-Longitudinal, randomized, multisite design -Conducted for 18 months and only included hospita	-94 hospitals (51 control, 43 study) -1,088 new nurses -All new nurses hired between July 1st and Sept 30th, 2011	-patients are now more diverse, sicker, older, and have several conditions - research question: Do transition to practice programs make a difference in new graduate outcomes in terms of safety, competence, stress, job satisfaction, and retention?	-Volunteer bias may have affected the results (institutions that volunteered may have had greater interest in transition than those who did not volunteer) -program may need to be longer than one year to have an impact for transitioning new graduate nurses	-Structured transition to practice programs can improve quality and safety practices in new graduate nurses and increase job satisfaction, reduce work stress, and decrease turnover -decrease errors and negative safety practices

	overall and specific competencies, safety practices, patient-care errors, work stress, and job satisfaction. -quantitative data collected from nurses managers, site coordinators, and preceptors through online surveys - tracked retention status					

Annotated Bibliography

Dyess, S. M., & Sherman, R. O. (2009). The first year of practice: New graduate nurses' transition and learning needs. *Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, 40* (9), 403-410. doi:10.3928/00220124-20090824-03

This source states that research indicates newly licensed nurses are lacking essential qualities such as important clinical skills that are necessary to be able to provide safe and quality care to their patients. This particular study involves participants in the Novice Nurse Leadership Institute, which is a one-year transition program aimed at strengthening the competency of newly licensed nurses. Pre and post program focus groups, where participants were asked questions, were used to gain knowledge about their experiences and learning needs as newly licensed nurses. This article also includes recommendations for the different problems these new nurses faced during the program and how to meet their specific needs. This source explains the needs that some new nurses have and I will consider these needs when interviewing newly licensed nurses who have graduated from Salem State University.

Saintsing, D., Gibson, L. M., & Pennington, A. W. (2011). The novice nurse and clinical decision-making: How to avoid errors. *Journal of Nursing Management, 19* (3), 354-359. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2834.2011.01248.x

This source states that novice nurses are at a higher risk than more experienced registered nurses at making errors during their practice. A majority of these mistakes

are associated with medication errors, patient falls, delays in treatments, documentation errors, or inability to follow physician's orders correctly or on time. This article makes it apparent that interventions are needed to increase novice nurses' awareness of potential errors. Suggestions are made such as improving clinical decision-making and improving nurse/physician communication.

Spector, N., Blegen, M. A., Silvestre, J., Barnsteiner, J., Lynn, M. R., Ulrich, B., . . . Alexander, M. (2015). Transition to practice study in hospital settings. *Journal of Nursing Regulation, 5* (4), 24-38.

This article focuses on newly licensed nurses and their need for an effective way to transition them into the nursing practice. Many hospitals participated in this study, with some in the control group and some in the study group, which adopted a specific transition program. The results of this study show that hospitals using this program had newly licensed nurses with higher competency levels and reported fewer patient care errors than the hospitals in the control group. The main argument of this study is that newly licensed nurses are in need of some type of quality transition program for when they first become practicing nurses. This source is helpful to me because it shows that new graduate nurses have learning needs even after passing their boards. I want to further investigate what these specific needs are and possibly how to meet these needs.

Spiva, L., Hart, P. L., Pruner, L., Johnson, D., Martin, K., Brakovich, B., . . . Mendoza, S., G. (2013). Hearing the voices of newly licensed RNs: The transition to practice. *American Journal of Nursing, 113* (11), 24-32. doi:10.1097/01.NAJ.0000437108.76232.20

In this, qualitative study, newly licensed registered nurses from the same hospital who had completed the orientation program were interviewed about their experiences. They were asked open-ended questions about the orientation experience and what could be done to improve it. Many of the nurses stated that preceptors were key to becoming confident in their practice. Many of them also learned how to better manage their time and communicate better with others. Some improvements found that could be made to the orientation program was adding classes on charting and hospital policies and procedures.

Strauss, M. B. (2009). Easing the transition: A successful new graduate program. *Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, 40* (5), 216-220. doi:10.3928/00220124-20090422-06

This article describes in detail the components of the Medical-Surgical New Graduate Nursing Program at Winchester Hospital. This specific program includes a clinical component, where new nurses further develop critical thinking and clinical skills. It also includes a classroom component, where they are familiarized with the electronic documentation system and must pass medication examinations. Several different people, including a nurse manager, clinical nurse specialist, and a new graduate instructor, support these new graduates in this program. Once they are assigned to their units, a preceptor helps them become adjusted to their specific units. The goal of this source is to evaluate the program

and learn from its strengths and weaknesses. This source is useful because it offers a way to improve the transition of new graduates when they become employed for the first time as nurses.

Mariani, B. (2012). Our ethical responsibility in the transition to practice for new RNs. *Pennsylvania Nurse, 67* (2), 4-7.

This article focuses on the need of a smooth transition to practice in order for new-to-practice registered nurses to be successful. It states that transition to practice is influenced by several different factors including orientation programs, mentoring, generational differences, lateral violence, and bullying. It also discusses the importance of building quality interrelationships between novice nurses and experienced nurses. The article states that experienced nurses have an ethical responsibility to treat their colleagues, including new nurses, with respect, fair treatment, and compassion. Patients are not the only ones who nurses need to respect. A critical factor when building these interrelationships is having knowledge and appreciation of generational differences. Having this knowledge will lead to successful relationships among novice and experienced nurses, which will lead to more successful new-to-practice nurses. This could also lead to fewer nurse turnovers, which are very costly. This source is useful because it describes the importance of healthy relationships between novice and experienced nurses and how this can make the transition to practice easier for new nurses. Other sources in this bibliography do not discuss this aspect of new nurse's needs. This source was helpful to me because it made me realize that new graduate nurses may benefit from learning how to deal with difficult colleagues.