

# The Implementation of the Graduate Nurse Role to Support Nursing Staff during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Introduction/Problem

- Recognized critical staffing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Governor Baker passed an executive order authorizing nursing graduates and senior nursing students to practice with a limited capacity
- Current process did not support the role of the graduate nurse (GN) practicing in the clinical setting

## Aim/Goal

- Increase the nursing workforce by implementing the GN role
- Swiftly create an orientation program that supported the GN amid the COVID-19 pandemic

## The Team

- Unit-Based Educators, Nurse Specialists, and Nursing Directors from inpatient medical-surgical and specialty care units

## The Interventions

- Three phased approach tailored to the individual GN:
  - Phase 1
    - Safety, basic assessments, documentation, prevention of harm, and use of basic equipment
  - Phase 2
    - Advanced assessment skills, medication administration, emergency care, telemetry, and ECG monitoring
  - Phase 3
    - Occurred once GN passed the NCLEX-RN exam and transitioned to the entry-level clinical nurse role
    - Continued focus on medication safety, in addition to prioritization of care and evaluation of critical thinking

GNs were surveyed upon completion of orientation and their transition to the entry-level RN role to assess comfort levels with various professional nursing roles and to identify knowledge gaps and areas for improvement

## The Outcomes

Fifteen of the 16 GNs successfully passed the NCLEX-RN and transitioned to an entry-level RN position with 12 responding to the survey. Six categories for discussion emerged:

- Work experience**
  - Ten had previous experience as a PCT, eight transitioned to a GN on the unit previously employed as a PCT
- Communication and feedback**
  - GNs felt comfortable communicating with coworkers, physicians, and patients and their families
  - Some reported a lack of communication regarding roles and responsibilities of the GN to other staff
  - GNs reported seeking feedback for their performance
- Support**
  - Most felt supported on their units and felt the orientation process was well communicated with them
  - Some stated that having several preceptors impacted the progression of their orientation
- Clinical confidence**
  - Several GNs expressed lack of confidence in performing end of life care
  - All felt they had adequate knowledge and experience to perform their job responsibilities
  - Most felt comfortable with new situations and procedures
- Workload**
  - Most GNs felt the workload was reasonable, feeling they could prioritize and organize patient care in a timely manner and felt comfortable delegating tasks when necessary
- Transition challenges**
  - A lack of confidence and fear were challenges GNs identified during their transition to practice, followed by perceived workload, role expectations, and how to use available resources
  - GNs desired more experience with medication administration, eMAR, medical equipment, emergency situations, and how to communicate efficiently with physicians

## Implications for Future



- Improve communication with nursing staff to increase the understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and limitations of those in the GN role
- Limit number of preceptors orienting a GN to one or two key preceptors and ensure communication occurs amongst those sharing this role

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