

How preceptorship programmes support students transition into becoming newly qualified nurses

Chantelle Meehan-Hardman, Senior Nurse Practitioner and Majida Tahir Registered Mental Health Nurse.

Describe your role

Maj: I'm a Registered Mental Health Nurse at Alternative Futures Group. My role involves support with medication, risk assessments and care planning. I also lead infection control which involves completing regular audits, and of course spending time with people who draw on care and support.

Chantelle: Nurses work very autonomously in this setting and provide management and leadership to the unit through ward rounds, multidisciplinary team meetings as well as managing my own caseload of patients. As mental health nurses we have specialist knowledge of the Mental Health Act which we need to utilise regularly.


Describe your setting

Maj: We're a 12-bed independent, rehabilitation unit supporting adults 18-65 with a diagnosis of severe and enduring mental illness. We're a charitable organisation although we often receive health funding. Individuals transition from hospital bed environment into bedsits which we have on site to support people to move forward with their lives. We support people to develop social skills utilising a holistic approach, supporting with medication, community integration and fostering relationships with family members.

How did it feel transitioning from a student to a newly qualified nurse?

Maj: I had a placement at Alternative Futures in my first year of study and this was my first ever placement. I really enjoyed it and took employment with them as part of their bank of support workers whilst I continued studying for my nursing degree. When I was nearing the end of my studies, I had found alternative employment but my Practice Assessor encouraged me to apply to work for Alternative Futures instead which was the best thing that I did. Because I'd had a placement with Alternative Futures, I already knew what to expect and I loved the working environment and found the staff really supportive.





As it was my first role, I wanted to make sure that I had the right level of support and that the organisation's culture reflected the need to support newly qualified staff and had a good preceptorship framework. I knew I would have this opportunity at Alternative Futures and that the manager and staff would be so supportive. Other friends of mine who qualified at the same time didn't have that offer where they went to work due to staff shortages.

As a result of the amount of support I had I didn't feel anxious at all about transitioning to a newly qualified nurse. I already felt that I knew the place and how it functioned so I was confident I'd be able to do a good job. Whenever I had a concern or wasn't sure about something I would always be offered the chance to shadow someone or get support and have reassurance.

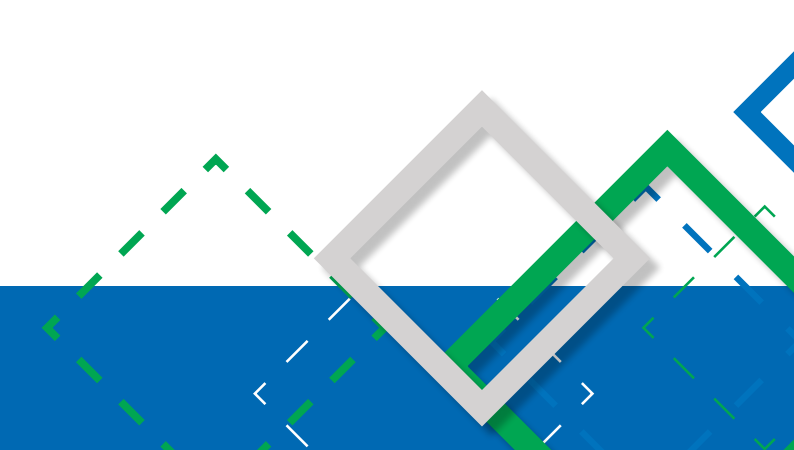
What did your preceptorship involve and how did it help you?

Maj: My preceptorship period was around six months. There were certain aspects that I needed to cover such as communication and understanding of policies and procedures. I needed to reflect on each aspect that I covered. I was also assessed in terms of medication management and making sure that I understood the medications and wrote reflections throughout the preceptorship period. There was also an incentive attached which was that when my preceptorship ended we were given a pay increase.

It gave me confidence when working alone and taking on the large responsibility of the role and managing the expectations of being newly qualified. Sometimes it can feel like 'sink or swim' when you qualify. However, with the right support a person doesn't feel like they are thrown into the deep end.

What do you think the benefits are for the organisation?

Chantelle: It breeds good staff who are confident in leadership and managing the expectations of the role. The shadowing period enables newly qualified workers to build relationships with the support staff and patients with the knowledge that someone is available to support. It fosters relationships from the very start and means that staff are invested. It means that any areas of development are identified early and support is put in place to improve practice. Knowing that a person has had the right kind of support means that we as an organisation are confident in what they can achieve.





What impact has it had on the quality of care and professional practice?

Chantelle: Preceptorship creates competent nurses which can only ensure the quality of care. It offers a good opportunity for staff to understand the role. Without shadowing, a newly qualified member of staff won't be able to observe good practice in action and develop into the kind of nurse they want to be.

Maj: As part of the programme, I needed to receive feedback from patients and through this I was able to evidence that I was meeting their needs by providing good quality care. Receiving feedback from peers is also hugely important as the reassurance from them fosters a positive working environment. If staff are enthusiastic and happy then this can only positively impact on patients.

What would you advise other organisations employing newly registered nurses and nursing associates or nurses and nursing associates new to the social care sector?

Chantelle: Some support that is offered is often online and this doesn't necessarily provide the same level of support that is gained through one-to-one support in the work environment. Through having a preceptorship framework and investing in staff they are more likely to want to stay as they will feel supported and valued. Research has indicated that pay isn't everything when it comes to retention it's also about how a person feels and their sense of belonging in an organisation.

