A Tribute to Our Nurse Leaders

Nurses, we've all been there: our first day on the floor as a new graduate nurse. I remember mine. Six-thirty in the morning, walking onto the cardiac unit with a slightly nauseous feeling, hoping that my preceptor would be nice, that I wouldn't make any mistakes, and that I would appear to actually know something. Little did I know that first day would be easy compared to some that would follow.

More than a decade later, I look back at that time with appreciation for those who took a vested interest in me and spent time helping me develop my nursing skills. Preceptors, nurse educators, coworkers, clinical nurse specialists, nursing managers, nursing directors, CNOs and senior nursing leadership – they all had a profound impact on me.

The American Nurses Association's 2019 Nurses Week theme is "4 million reasons to celebrate," in reference to the 4 million nurses throughout the U.S. This nurse's week I would like to take time to celebrate and recognize all of the nurse leaders who nurture new graduates as they transition into their roles.

As nurse leaders, you're the most impactful role model for the new graduate. As nursing faces a job growth rate of 15% by 2026, you're confronted with the reality that you'll need to continue to support a large number of new graduate nurses. How can you ensure that in 2026 we'll have 4.6 million reasons to celebrate?

- **Be a good listener.** Make time to sit down and talk with them one on one. Encourage them to share both their fears and their assurances.
- **Be patient.** Competence doesn't come when orientation is over and experience doesn't happen overnight. Provide learning opportunities to help them expand their knowledge.
- **Be a mentor.** Provide guidance in their professional development and coach them along on their path to success.
- **Be a good role model.** They're watching you, so remember to set a good example.
- **Be open.** Make the effort to understand their unique generational views. You might be surprised at the benefits a different generation can bring to the team.

Although you may not notice, you make an impact on those new graduate nurses every day when you come to work (and even sometimes when you're at home and they're texting you with a work question). It was also the tissue you passed them when their first patient passed away, the ear you lent them when they were frustrated, the policy you created to prevent workplace bullying and the support you gave them when a physician was giving them a hard time. You taught them how to change a chest tube (and reviewed it 10 times) and you provided them with the strategies to manage conflicts in a hospital setting. You were there when they felt most vulnerable in their career.

If we reflect on those who impacted our first year of nursing it was because they provided us with one of the above qualities. It was the preceptor who had the patience, the director who believed you could succeed, the coworker who took the time to listen, the chief nursing officer who embodied a true leader and the educator who encouraged you. Continue to support your new graduate nurses because you're making a difference in a new nurse's professional journey. Thank you for all that you do and Happy Nurses Week!
About the author. Angela Renkema serves as programmatic advisor for the Vizient/AACN Nurse Residency Program. In addition to leading the onboarding of new organizations to the program, she provides implementation support for new coordinators and contributes to the development of program training materials and resources. Prior to her role at Vizient, Renkema was a nurse educator and nurse residency program coordinator at MedStar Washington Hospital Center.

Language:
English

Source URL: https://newsroom.vizientinc.com/vizient-blog/clinical/tribute-our-nurse-leaders

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