

A Case Study for Pediatric Educators

Taking Orientation Back to Basics: Setting New Nurses Up to Care for Patients of All Acuity Levels

Hospital adjusts to a progressive nursing orientation model across pediatric units, resulting in increased competency and decreased burnout for learners.

Nurses joining University Health System Children's Health units, whether transferring from other specialties or newly graduated, were often struggling with mastering all the skills necessary to care for patients with varying acuity levels during their allotted orientation time. As a result, there was risk of turnover, transfers to lower acuity units, and increased training periods. This placed additional strain on charge nurses who had to select lower acuity patients for these new nurses while continuing to develop their competencies with higher acuity care.

A Back-to-Basics Solution

Many traditional nursing orientation programs, including the one University Health System Children's Health previously used, initially assign orientees to the full care of a single patient and introduce more patients over time. This approach requires learners to spread their attention across a wide variety of skills immediately upon entering the unit. Nurse Educator III, Sheryl Hernandez, MSN, RN, CPN, NPD-BC, worked with her team to adjust their approach to a progressive orientation model, which allows trainees to master smaller skill categories before adding another.

"Most nursing programs have a semester or less of pediatric care and limited exposure to pediatric clinical opportunities," Hernandez said. "Everything the new graduate nurse learns is on-the-job training. This includes weight-based medication administration, critical thinking, medical equipment, caring for the family unit, and much more. We have 10 to 16 weeks to prepare the orientees to successfully manage the assignment, document accurately and thoroughly, and develop a level of clinical judgment and advocacy to safely care for their patients and families. The use of a progressive orientation model introduces aspects of nursing in an orderly fashion, building upon the skills, knowledge, and time management throughout."

The team began by increasing the length of orientation to accommodate the new training model: two weeks for Pediatric Intermediate Care (PIMU) and Acute Care units and four weeks for the PICU. Across these units, the onboarding process was adjusted to include several parts:

- **Nurse residency class:** Within the first month of hire, staff attend a class that includes a medication administration lecture, medication testing with calculations and hands-on experience, and hands-on training with crash carts and defibrillators.



LESSONS LEARNED

A progressive orientation model fosters:

- Broad patient exposure, increased knowledge, an understanding of unit practices, and awareness of available resources and equipment before beginning orientation shifts on the unit.
- Confidence throughout orientation and upon completion.
- Independence and accountability when encountering something new.
- Stronger teamwork throughout the unit.

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- **Experiences week:** Prior to beginning their orientation within the unit, learners are given a week to spend time with various disciplines including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech language pathology, respiratory therapy, Child Life, and the Pediatric Sedation Team. They also participate in a unit-specific skills day to provide a well-rounded understanding of patient care across the hospital.
- **Orientation period:** Orientees are assigned a full patient load (usually three to five patients, varying by unit) and are expected to perform a set of skills for those patients. They start with assessments and documentation, then add medication administration and other skills over several weeks. While there are suggested timeframes for each skill tier depending on the unit, staff progress at an individual pace as they demonstrate competency.

By the end of their orientation, staff showed the ability to safely and competently care for patients of any acuity on their particular unit.

Individualized Results Per Unit

Since implementing the new model, each unit has further customized their orientation styles:

- Acute Care adopted a hybrid of the old and new orientation styles. Staff successfully complete orientation on time and care for a full assignment (five patients).
- PIMU utilized the new plan successfully.
- PICU incorporated the plan for all incoming new hires. Preceptors engage and continually provide feedback. New graduates show increased confidence throughout orientation.
- Orientees across all units provided positive feedback regarding the progressive style of orientation.