

THE TRANSITION FROM GRADUATE NURSE TO COMPETENT ONCOLOGY NURSE: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

We are in the throes of a nursing shortage that will only worsen in the next decade. Based on nursing workforce studies and economic predictions, Fox Chase Cancer Center has begun hiring new graduates as a source of "nursepower." To ensure a successful outcome, we have accepted the following assumptions:

- 1) New nurses enter the workforce with minimal clinical experience due, in part, to the shift from hospital to university based nursing programs.
- 2) Employers must develop orientation programs that foster growth and development by breaking down competencies into small tasks that can be mastered step by step.
- 3) Nurse retention is linked to successful orientation experiences.

A multi-tier competency-based curriculum was developed to assist new graduates in the transition to competent oncology nurses. A review of basic medical-surgical nursing principles is incorporated into a series of lectures and practicum during the initial weeks of orientation. The second tier includes oncology-intensive course content and clinical experience. The third tier focuses on patient-care management and leadership competencies. Guided by the principles of adult learning, pre-assessed learning needs are matched with mandatory requirements. A clinical nurse specialist is the dedicated coordinator who facilitates all aspects of the program. Because preceptors are an important component of a successful orientation, we have instituted an eight-hour preceptor course for staff who are willing and qualified.

Program implementation will begin June 11, 2001. We have budgeted for eight positions above our staffing complement, allowing us to count orientation time as non-productive hours. This will maximize the orientation experience and minimize orientee stress.

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