

Guidelines for Role Expectations

The following preceptor guidelines were developed in a Minnesota Department of Health project through the support of a federal grant, titled “Linking Public Health Nursing Practice and Education to Promote Population Health” (Minnesota Department of Health, 2005). Selected guidelines from the Preceptor Manual are included in this instructor guide. “A preceptor is a person who teaches, counsels, inspires, serves as a role model and supports the growth and development of an individual (the novice) for a fixed and limited amount of time with the specific purpose of socializing the novice into a new role” (Morrow, 1984).

For students, preceptors enhance the link between theoretical knowledge and the practice of public health nursing and provide a supportive relationship for students during their population-based clinical experience. PHN preceptors from local and tribal health departments collaborate with schools of nursing and baccalaureate public health nursing students to bring to life the passion of public health nursing and the complexity of the PHN role. Preceptors help strengthen the link between the health department and the schools of nursing by assisting students in integrating their learning objectives with “real-world” nursing practice skills and in their efforts to assist the health department to meet its public health goal.

Benefits for the Preceptor

The added responsibility for taking on the preceptor role brings potential benefits to the PHN preceptor (Beancuzzo, 1994). These benefits include:

- A sense of achievement
- Recognition of the added responsibility
- The reward of contributing to the development of a future public health nurse
- The opportunity for professional advancement

Preceptor Qualifications

For PHNs who wish to take on the preceptor role, having the following qualifications will contribute to a successful experience:

- Interest in the preceptor role
- Completion of a preceptor orientation program
- Knowledge of population-based practice that includes: 1) practice at the individual/family, systems, and community levels, 2) public health interventions, and 3) Cornerstones of Public Health Nursing (Keller, Strohschein, & Schaffer, 2011)
- Sufficient experience and expertise as a PHN to be able to convey the essential components of the PHN role to students
- Strong communication skills that include verbally negotiating needs and expectations of individuals as well as providing both positive and negative feedback to others
- Ability to support the learning process of students

- Willingness to develop qualities will contribute to being an effective preceptor, including acting as:
 - A model: someone who others admire and wish to emulate
 - An investor: someone who invests time and energy into someone else's personal growth
 - A supporter: someone who offers emotional support and builds self-confidence in others
 - An idea bouncer: someone who will listen and discuss others' ideas
 - A problem-solver: someone who will help to examine problems and identify possible solution
 - A teacher/coach: someone who can teach interpersonal, technical, and political skills essential for advancement

Preceptor Role and Expectations

Preceptors guide and enhance the population-based learning of students by providing ideas, information, resources, knowledge, and feedback about the reality of practice. They work with a specific student or group of students for the duration of their clinical experience in the health department (usually 6–10 weeks) and are available to students regularly. Possible roles/activities include:

- Attend preceptor training(s).
- Together with health department administration, student(s), and faculty identify a variety of population-based learning opportunities for the PHN student clinical experience.
- Assure ongoing communication with health department, school of nursing, and student.
- Be available to student(s) as arranged and contact student(s) if unable to make a scheduled meeting.
- Support population-based curriculum and assist in real-life application within the framework of clinical course objectives.
- Assist student in developing knowledge and skills for population-based practice.
- Act as health department and community resource person for faculty.
- Act as community resource and support for PHN students in the health department.
- Role model professional practice including values and ethics of caring for diverse population.
- Integrate adult learning theory and principles in interactions with students.
- Use coaching techniques to assist students to problem solve complex situations encountered by PHN.
- Provide feedback regarding student progress, identify problems, and suggest ways to resolve issues.
- Together with faculty and health department, evaluate the preceptor experience. It is not the role of the preceptor to “grade” the student. The preceptor may contribute to the student evaluation.)

Student Role and Expectations

Students are responsible to maximize and enhance their learning opportunities through the following activities:

Together with preceptor, faculty members, and other health department staff, identify a range of population-based learning opportunities for the PHN student clinical experience.

- Assure ongoing communication with health department, preceptor, and faculty.
- Fulfill the learning goals, course objectives, and assignments.
- Communicate learning needs to preceptor. Ask questions. Seek feedback.
- Follow up on suggestions/recommendations made by preceptor.
- Contact preceptor if unable to make scheduled meetings.
- Participate in evaluation of clinical experience.

Health Department Expectations

Local health departments collaborate with nursing faculty and students to create a positive learning experience in community settings. Actions that support a positive clinical experience for students include:

Together with preceptor, faculty members, and student, identify a range of learning opportunities for the PHN student clinical experience.

- Assure ongoing communication with school of nursing, preceptor, and student.
- Support preceptor and provide resources and accommodation for PHN student experience.
- Together with the faculty, preceptor and student(s), evaluate the preceptor program.
- Identify the contributions students are making to the work of the health department.
- Communicate benefits of hosting students to governing and advisory boards.

Faculty/Schools of Nursing Expectations

Nursing educators need to determine the best way to be present for student learning experiences and work closely with health department preceptors to ensure positive learning clinical experiences. Suggested actions include the following:

Together with preceptor, health department, and student, formulate learning opportunities for the PHN student clinical experience.

- Assure ongoing communication with health department, preceptor, and student(s).
- Provide support for the preceptor.
- Provide feedback to the preceptor.
- Make available class materials such as course syllabus and/or community health nursing text.
- Together with the health department, preceptor, and student(s), evaluate the preceptor experience. The faculty member retains the responsibility for grading the student's work.