

Abstract

Graduate nursing education is a combination of didactic and clinical instruction. Clinical instruction is achieved primarily by pairing a student with either an experienced physician or certified nurse practitioner (NP) who will serve as a preceptor. The student/preceptor relationship may be initiated by nursing faculty or by the student.

The quality of clinical instruction is crucial to the professional development of the NP. During this time of intense clinical instruction, students learn the process of applying the principles of diagnostic reasoning in a real world setting. Socialization into the role of the NP is an important component of the clinical education and may be impacted by the relationship established between the student and the preceptor.

Multiple factors may have an impact on the resulting experience and relationship. Attitudes of both student and preceptor define and shape the relationship that develops throughout the clinical rotation. The student's perception of the quality of the clinical experience may impact the outcome of the experience including the student's sense of self-efficacy and confidence in practice skills and socialization into the role.

This study focuses on the student's perception of self-efficacy and confidence based on whether a mentoring relationship was established with at least one preceptor during the clinical experience. The study, a modified replication of Hayes' 1997 study, demonstrated a strong sense of mentoring, self-efficacy and self-confidence in students enrolled in the final clinical course of a nurse practitioner program. The single most predictive factor for self-efficacy and self-confidence is length of time the student works with the preceptor as measured by months of clinical rotation.

Other predictors of self-efficacy and self-confidence included the students' perception of a mentor and how that mentorship was instrumental in the development of the skills and abilities necessary for transition into the role of the nurse practitioner. Self-efficacy was found to correlate highly with feelings of self-confidence in beginning skills such as physical assessment as well as higher level skills of diagnostic reasoning.

As the students neared the end of clinical courses in the nurse practitioner program, most felt prepared to begin practice and cited traits similar to those attributed to preceptors as indicators of preparedness.