

What to Look for in a Nurse Residency Program

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Graduating from nursing school and passing your nursing boards is an exciting time in your nursing career. You typically feel on top of the world and can't wait to start your first job as a "real" nurse. But what type of experience are you going to have during your first year as a nurse? Will you be supported with additional classes to build your confidence and skill set? Will the organization invest in your professional development? Will you be mentored? All of these are good questions that you should be asking as you seek your first nursing job.

As a new graduate nurse today you are faced with acutely ill patients in complex settings more now than ever before in healthcare. You need time to transition from a student nurse to a practicing nurse. Nurse residency programs (NRPs) help new graduate nurses (NGNs) transition into competent practitioners at the bedside. NRPs are designed to give NGNs adequate time and support during their first year of practice to become competent practitioners. NRPs were introduced as best practice programs through the advisement of several agencies and research findings over the last ten years. The Joint Commission and the Carnegie Foundation recommended hospitals implement standard NRPs to help NGNs within their first year of practice

NRPs should build upon your clinical unit-based orientation with advanced professional development classes to further develop your confidence and skillset. Currently in practice there are three types of models for transition to practice in nursing. They include homegrown hospital based programs, for profit models (University Hospital Consortium/Association of American College of Nursing (UHC/AACN) and Versant), and most recently a pilot program through the

National Council of State Boards of Nursing. How these NRP model are operationalize within the practice setting may differ but many consist of similar components such as precepted experiences, professional development classes and mentorship.

Some great questions to ask in interviews include:

1. Does your hospital have a formal transition program for NGN's?
2. Who long will I be in the residency program?
3. Will I have a dedicate preceptors and for how long?
4. What does the curriculum of the NRP look like?
5. Do you have any outcomes you can share with my related to your NRP?

As more hospitals begin to implement NRPs a across the country validating the quality of NRPs needs to happen. Two accrediting agencies, the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) and Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), have created accreditation criteria that use current empiric evidence to test NRPs against rigorous standards. NRPs who have sought accreditation are evaluated by peers. Accreditation validates that the NRP is a high-quality robust program that is rooted in the literature that will help support NGN transition to Registered Nurses.

As you begin your nursing career I challenge you to seek employment from practice settings that have formalized NRPs. NRP have proven to enhance a new graduate's transition into practice for over a decade. By beginning your careers in a NRP you will have support that encourages you to grow and have the skills needed to be a successful high functioning nurse.