



## Strategy 8

Strengthen opportunities and incentives for later-career nurses to participate in mentor and preceptor roles

**Strategy 8.1** Employers of nurses should promote and support the concept of nurse mentor as a highly valued professional practice role and develop or sustain roles for nurses to serve as unit leaders, mentors, and preceptors that provide:

- a. Relevant management training and supports.
- b. Formalized systems of knowledge transfer and mentoring.
- c. Professional valuing of the nurse mentor role.

### Desired Result

Nurse mentorship will be a valued role and relationship and employers of nurses will work to intentionally develop potential nurse mentors.

### Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

Promoting and supporting the role of nurse mentors is crucial for employers as it fosters professional development, enhances patient care, and contributes to a positive work environment. Nurses in mentorship roles act as unit leaders, guiding less experienced nurses through complex clinical situations and nurturing their professional growth. This investment in mentorship not only upholds high standards of care but also contributes to job satisfaction and retention by creating a supportive learning culture. Furthermore, having seasoned nurses serve as preceptors improves the transfer of knowledge to new nurses and helps to maintain best practices. This can ultimately lead to improved patient outcomes and a strengthened health care team.

### Context

Nurse unit leaders, mentors, and preceptors play a pivotal role in health care, serving as the backbone of nursing teams and the bridge between management and staff.

- **Unit leaders** are responsible for overseeing the operations of a nursing unit, ensuring that patient care is delivered efficiently and effectively. They set the tone for the unit's working environment and culture, fostering teamwork and collaboration among staff.
- **Mentors** in nursing provide guidance and support to less-experienced nurses, aiding in their professional development and helping them navigate the complexities of patient care. Through one-on-one coaching, they share valuable knowledge and skills, contributing to the overall competence and confidence of the nursing staff.
- **Preceptors**, on the other hand, are tasked with the hands-on orientation and training of new nurses or nursing students. They introduce novices to the practical aspects of nursing, from patient care protocols to the nuances of daily operations within a health care facility. Preceptors play a critical role in the transition of new nurses into the workforce, ensuring they are well-prepared to meet the demands of the profession.

These roles are essential in maintaining high standards of nursing practice, promoting quality patient outcomes, and ensuring a robust pipeline of skilled nursing professionals ready to meet the future challenges of health care.

### Spotlight on North Carolina

"My experience during the Oncology Nurse Leader Mentor Program was great. The program gave me the opportunity to identify my baseline strengths and weaknesses and allowed me to have a dedicated person to be a resource for me.

The program was structured to allow me to focus on some of the key aspects that are important to develop and grow the nurse leader, things like (finance, multi-disciplinary collaboration, and conflict resolution). Previously nurse managers entering the role as an oncology leader would learn how to handle these scenarios as they occurred, but participating in this mentorship program allowed me the opportunity to have a baseline knowledge of how to handle the scenario should it present itself.

I also feel that being part of this program helped me understand my executive leadership structure, my help chain and resources that are available to me in my role. Participating in this program has set me up for longevity in leadership and I certainly recommend this to all new nurse leaders."

*--Personal communication. Nursing Manager, Operations, Duke Cancer center Raleigh. Amanda Eley. April 17, 2024.*

## CHAPTER 3 - DEVELOPING, SUSTAINING, AND RETAINING NURSES IN THEIR CAREERS

Employers can play a critical role in developing nurses into unit leaders, mentors, and preceptors. They can facilitate this by providing leadership training and continuing education opportunities and by fostering a culture that values mentorship and peer support. Recognizing and rewarding these roles can motivate experienced nurses to take them on. Additionally, creating structured mentorship and preceptorship programs can ensure that knowledge is effectively passed on, improving patient care quality and nursing staff retention. Employers can also support networking and professional development activities that allow nurses to learn from each other and from leaders in the field.

Mentorship can be particularly important for groups that are underrepresented in nursing or who have faced barriers to advancing in their careers. The summary report from the listening sessions on racism in nursing conducted by the American Nurses Association and the National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing makes the following assertion on this topic:

*“The need for formal and structured mentorship programs was a common theme referenced during each listening session. Nurses expressed the wish that they had learned how to navigate racism in nursing through mentorship programs. Nurses shared experiences of other BIPOC nurses who provided informal mentorship and support and even mentorship by White allies aware of the challenges of racism in the workplace who offered advice on how to navigate the challenges of racism imposed by their peers. Most important, nurses expressed the frustration of not seeing changes in the landscape throughout their careers and the desire to mentor future nurses to help them advance.”<sup>9</sup>*

### KEY RESOURCE NEEDS



Introducing new trainings and processes may require additional or reallocation of funds by employers. Health care payers could help by identifying payment incentives for employers that have intentional and structured mentor or preceptor development programs.



Trade associations can help to direct employers to existing resources for best practices in mentorship and leadership development.