

### BACKGROUND

Healthcare facilities were understaffed well before the pandemic, and without the proper personnel and supplies, the quality and safety of patient care declined. Safety rules and regulations were set aside to keep healthcare from crumbling (1). Novice nurses and nursing students faced many challenges.

- Experienced nurses left the profession due to increased patient loads, mandatory overtime requirements, and minimal interventions from hospital administration. (2).
- Social distancing required in-person clinical shift supplementation with simulation labs and online training, leaving novice nurses to practice with minimal hands-on experience with patients (3).
- Regulatory exceptions expedited the transition of senior nursing students and new graduates into clinical practice in hopes of solving the crisis staffing shortage.
- New graduate nurses entering the workforce expressed concerns about experiencing chaotic onboarding processes that left gaps in their training process (4).
- There is a dire need for policy reform to establish formal evidence-based transition programs to ensure clinical readiness, confidence in practice, and patient safety (5).

**How has the administration's response to the (P) COVID-19 staffing crisis (O) ensured safe and quality care, (I) including assessment of clinical preparedness of (C) unlicensed/novice nurses on medical/surgical units?**

### DISCUSSION

#### Staffing Shortages and Patient Safety

- Nurse turnover intentions significantly increased after COVID-19 (6).
- Increased nurse workloads, understaffing, and time constraints contributed to increased medical errors and near misses during the pandemic (7).

#### Graduating Nurses and Difficulties Transitioning

- Nurses reported inadequate training, canceled clinical shifts, limited patient interactions, and frequent changes in on-the-job training skills leading to feelings of incompetence (4).
- Preceptors and charge nurses were assumed to bridge the gap between live instruction and online learning (8).

#### Transition Programs Promote Patient Safety

- Transition programs prepare new graduate nurses with the tools to make educated clinical decisions about patient interventions (9).
- Novice nurses identified critical thinking aptitude as the lowest competency of their skills (10).

### METHODS

A review of current literature examining clinical competency and the impact of the implementation of training programs for novice nurses transitioning from school to independent practice identified three themes. Data including staffing turnover factors included wages, geographical location, and safety repercussions of unsafe nurse-to-patient ratios before and after the pandemic was analyzed. Next, mental and physical well-being conflicts experienced by new graduates during their transition to practice during COVID-19 were explored. Lastly, data correlating patient outcomes and safety standards to novice nurses' experience, education, and clinical preparedness identified a training gap, specifically for nurses who have graduated during or after the pandemic. The ARCC Model (11) and QSEN's six KSAs (12) were used as the project framework to promote the initiation of systemic change.

### EVALUATION

#### Development

- Interactive PowerPoint presentation of training activities, sample curriculum, and clinical evaluation tools.
- Nurse clinical competency evaluation tool using QSEN's 6 KSAs with numerical ratings providing quantitative results for future comparison.
- Trainee, mentor, and self-evaluation form.

#### Presentation

- Meet with clinical educators and unit managers for unit-specific educational and mentoring needs.
- Present evidence-based training material to the project team that incorporates QSEN's 6 KSAs and incorporate suggested changes.
- Present final project to unit manager, mentor and trainee volunteers, and management.
- Mentors attend the first 6-week training program.
- Launch 6-week pilot program with volunteer novice nurses and mentors. Collect and disseminate feedback.
- Go live with a training program for all new hires during orientation.

#### Evaluation

- Collect and disseminate feedback from participants. Adjust content as needed.
- Compare the organization's key patient safety indicators (PSI) before and after the program.
- Conduct yearly evaluations of PSIs and adjust programs as needed.
- Disseminate significant findings to stakeholders.

### CONCLUSIONS

- Nurses who graduated during and after the pandemic need more knowledge and experience because of the ripple effect COVID-19 had on our healthcare system.
- The pre-existing nursing shortage has been exacerbated by the pandemic leaving novice nurses vulnerable to unforeseeable distress early in their careers (13).
- Organizations must give their nurses the proper tools to learn critical thinking skills to provide safe, high-quality patient care.
- Evidence-based training programs will decrease the educational gap of novice nurses in past and future disaster situations.

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