

**American Association of Colleges of Nursing
Clinical Nurse Leadership Implementation Task Force
Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL)sm Preceptor Guidelines**

April 2006

The Preceptor Role

The preceptor's role is to facilitate the Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL) students' achievement of the end of program competencies.ⁱ The preceptor should have a clear understanding of the CNL role functions delineated in the AACN *Working Paper on the Role of the Clinical Nurse Leader*.ⁱⁱ Although several individuals or preceptors may be identified to provide the breadth of clinical experiences necessary for the students to attain the expected competencies, one individual should be designated the preceptor of record. Highly effective preceptors display the following:

Knowledge and Clinical Competence

- a breadth of competencies that enable them as exemplary clinicians in the provision of nursing care to groups of patients
- a comprehensive understanding of patient situations and the ability to access appropriate resources to obtain additional theoretical or technical information as needed
- knowledge of how to complete treatment modalities including pharmacological management
- recognition of the importance of the CNL as the lateral integrator of care which involves improved communication, decreased fragmentation, and the facilitation and coordination of care.
- knowledge of agency standards, professional issues and health care policy which enables them to facilitate decisions about patients that are timely and appropriate
- ability to facilitate learning aimed at assuring quality patient care.

Thus, through role modeling, coaching and demonstration, highly effective preceptors foster the learning of CNL students.

Clinical Decisions & Delegation

- formulate critical clinical decisions about the care of patients as a result of their knowledge and clinical competence
- ask pertinent questions
- effectively complete assessments
- use critical thinking to ascertain patient priorities

- differentiate the role of the CNL, the four advanced practice nursing roles, and the nurse manager role
- support CNL students as they integrate information essential to prioritizing, providing care and delegating tasks to maximize patient outcomes

Communication

- possess exceptional communication skills as demonstrated through respectful demeanor and clarity when talking with patients, students, and other members of the health care team
- garner respect from others as they recommend patient assignments and oversee care provided to groups of patients
- bring to all clinical situations the necessary skills for reporting and documenting patient care and assist CNL students in thorough follow-through with this responsibility
- effectively elicit critical questions from students as they develop sound clinical judgment.

Professional demeanor

- purposeful behavior and a positive approach
- display of self confidence in the organized and deliberate manner in which they implement their preceptor role
- appearance and language illustrate high level professional behavior

In addition to the above professional behaviors, the CNL preceptor will have specific role responsibilities which are distinct from but supportive to the role of the academic/course faculty. The following explanations delineate the responsibilities for the preceptor and faculty assisting the CNL students in mastering their new role. This document ends with a guide to outline the types of clinical experiences that could be made available to CNL students so they can achieve specific competencies.

Preceptor Responsibilities

The preceptor should be able to guide the students toward clinical practicum experiences that will assist them to meet their learning goals and enable them to reach optimum effectiveness in their practice. Specific responsibilities for the preceptor include:

- Mentoring
- Designing learning experiences aimed at assisting students to reach learning goals

- Locating or creating learning resources within the clinical site that will help students achieve the end of program competencies
- Facilitating students access to the above resources
- Evaluating the students based on an evaluation tool provided by the college/university faculty and in consultation with the faculty member

Preceptors need not be in a position that utilizes all the aspects of CNL practice; however, they should be in a position to facilitate the students' ability to learn and practice in the CNL role. The preceptor should be knowledgeable about the health care system in which they operate and be able to arrange appropriate experiences for the students. For example, the preceptor should be able to arrange for the students to work with information technology system personnel to learn about clinical data collection and management - and should have the support of nursing and other administrative personnel to do this.

The preceptor may be unit based or function in a non-unit based capacity that includes regular contact with unit patients and personnel. Appropriate preceptors may include:

- unit based nurse managers
- nursing department heads
- nursing education department personnel assigned to the unit where the students are based
- advanced practice nurses

The preceptor should have a master's or higher degree in nursing. A BSN with appropriate experience is the minimum requirement. It is important that the preceptor be available to the students on a daily basis throughout the intensive practicum and be available to the students through electronic means at all times when the students are on site at the health care facility.

Faculty Responsibilities: Each student is assigned a preceptor and a program-based (on-campus) faculty member. The faculty member is responsible for:

- coordinating student clinical placement
- formulating a student evaluation tool (based on course objectives and end of program competencies) for use by the preceptor in evaluating the student
- orienting the preceptor to use of the student evaluation tool and to expectations regarding student and preceptor performance
- guiding the student in developing individual goals for the intensive clinical experience

- developing guidelines for and providing guidance to the student during projects
- evaluating major projects such as the evidence-based practice project and the QA activity
- conducting the final clinical evaluation in consultation with the preceptor
- evaluating, through site visits to the clinical placement, student progress toward course goals
- collaborating with preceptors
- evaluating adequacy of the clinical site and clinical experience

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing and the CNL Implementation Task Force wishes to thank for their role in developing this job description:

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References

ⁱ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2004). End of Program Competencies for the Clinical Nurse Leader. Accessed at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/CNL/partnershipresources.htm>.

ⁱⁱ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2004). Working Paper on the Clinical Nurse Leader Role. Accessed at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Publications/docs/CNL6-04.DOC>