



RURAL CALIFORNIA NURSING PRECEPTORSHIPS
A Unique Clinical Nursing Experience That Builds Confidence & Competency

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PROGRAM GUIDELINES

The Preceptorship Experience

The use of preceptorships as a teaching method has been successfully utilized in a variety of professional training programs. This type of teaching allows students to work in a nursing specialty, or as a nurse generalist, in a one-on-one preceptor/student partnership. Students can expect to grow in confidence as their goals and objectives are met and their need for supervision decreases. It is a rewarding and exciting experience for both the preceptor and the student as the student progresses and growth becomes evident.

Students who decide to pursue this experience must possess qualities befitting this manner of independent study. Self-assurance and the ability to work well with minimal supervision are critical to success. Understanding one's limitations and knowing when to seek supervision are also important qualities. Additionally, because RCNP students work with no direct supervision from college faculty, it is essential that they are highly accountable and demonstrate the ability to exercise good judgement.

During your placement period, you will be working closely with your preceptor. Your preceptor is considered the on-site instructor and supervisor. Together, you and your preceptor will develop a plan that will adequately address your goals and objectives. It is important to remember that open communication with your preceptor will give you more latitude in your overall experience and maximize valuable learning time. If good communication is developed early in your placement, both parties will have a successful and meaningful preceptorship.

The first week of your placement is a period of adjustment during which you will be in the introductory phase of learning your new role and becoming acquainted with staff. Acclimatization into the new setting takes energy. Try to be patient with yourself as you become familiar with your new situation. Often, the ability to talk with someone who is not at the site makes the adjustment phase go more easily. The Coordinator is available to you during this adjustment phase as well as throughout the remainder of the program. Contacting the Coordinator when you *first have a problem* is important. Do not wait until the problem has become a major obstacle in your learning process.

Making the Most of Your Preceptorship

In order to get the most out of your preceptorship, we have developed the following list of suggestions that will help you develop a strong rapport with your preceptor and build trust and respect among the rest of the health care team:

- **Meet with your preceptor before you begin.** *If possible*, take time before your first day to discuss what you hope to get out of this experience. Prior to you contacting him/her, your preceptor will have received an introductory packet that includes:
 - 1) your written goals and objectives
 - 2) your introductory letter
 - 3) your photo
 - 4) your skills proficiency list
 - 5) a *Preceptor Handbook* which includes RCNP protocols and helpful tips for your preceptor on creating a positive preceptorship experience.

Suggested topics that you may want to discuss at your first meeting include your:

- 1) goals and objectives
- 2) strengths and weaknesses
- 3) learning and teaching styles
- 4) past work experience and skill level
- 5) previous preceptorship experiences
- 6) creating a general plan or strategy for your first week. (It is recommended to do this on a weekly basis thereafter.

It is wise to also review/share with your preceptor the following:

- 1) RCNP protocols
- 2) Student Evaluation and Table of Hours
- 3) Contact phone number during your placement

- **Take an active role in the relationship.** Your preceptor will know how to best assist you if you seek out his/her guidance rather than passively assume he/she will know what you need. It is suggested that you review the *Program Guidelines* a second time before beginning your placement.
- **Apply what you learn.** Your preceptor will likely give you advice or offer suggestions. Take the advice to heart, and try out his/her suggestions. Stretch yourself a little and try out new things.
- **Show appreciation.** Let your preceptor know how much you appreciate him/her. Showing gratitude will go a long way toward nurturing your relationship.
- **Be a respectful member of the health care team.** Be aware of the need to respect the staff and their opinions as you learn your way around the facility.
- **Present yourself professionally.** First impressions are important and enduring, especially when you will be at your placement site for such a short period of time. Paying attention to dress and grooming will help to make a positive impression on the staff.
- **Be Prompt.** Showing up on time tells people that you take your assignment seriously, especially when you aren't getting paid to be there. In addition, if the workload is such that your preceptor is called upon to work overtime in order to see a special situation through; you will make a positive impression if you "go that extra mile" with him/her. Not only will your help be appreciated, but your bond with the team will become stronger.
- **Stick to your Schedule.** Once you establish your schedule with your preceptor, it is wise to adhere to it. Taking excessive liberties with your schedule communicates to your preceptor that your preceptorship is not your first priority. To the extent that you take your preceptorship seriously, your preceptor will too.
- **Contact the RCNP coordinator as needed.** If any problems or concerns are raised during your placement, please promptly notify the Coordinator. If you are not comfortable with the degree of supervision provided by your preceptor, it is imperative that you express your concerns to the Coordinator. It is important to take appropriate and immediate action so you do not jeopardize your student role or your future/current professional license.

- **Give it a Week!** Remember, it takes time to adjust to your new surroundings. In most cases, a comfortable level of adjustment occurs by the end of the first week.

RCNP CLINICAL PROTOCOLS

Unlicensed Nursing Students:

- I. Students may practice only those clinical skills that they have previously covered in the theory component of their nursing school curriculum.

- II. Medication Administration:
 - a. All IV therapy must be directly supervised by the preceptor. This includes direct supervision of IV medication preparation and administration.
 - b. The first intra-muscular injection administered by the student should be directly supervised by the preceptor.
 - c. Students may give prn medications independently after they have demonstrated competency to their preceptor.
 - d. Reminder: All doses of narcotics: Heparin, Aminophylline, and Insulin must be double-checked by an RN prior to administration. Additionally, narcotics must be co-signed in the narcotics log by an RN.

- III. All vaginal examinations should be duplicated by the preceptor to assure accuracy.

- IV. All verbal orders taken by students should be directly supervised (via phone or in person) by an RN.

- V. Students are not permitted to perform arterial blood draws (ABGs) during their Preceptorships, however they may perform venipuncture if they have covered IV starts in Theory portion of their studies.

- VI. Should the preceptor be unable to work on a given day (low census, sick, etc.), the student may work with another RN at the discretion of the preceptor.

- VII. Students will chart on those patients for whom they provide any direct care and/or for whom they make significant observations. Preceptors should review charting for clarity and comprehensiveness. Your preceptor's co-signature may be required per hospital policy.

- VIII. Students should be aware of hospital protocol and the needs of the staff, and should follow appropriate lines of communication and be sensitive to the demands of the staff when asking questions.

- IX. Students are responsible for reporting immediately any relevant changes in their patients' status or pertinent observations. In addition, students should seek assistance and supervision for all procedures that are beyond their ability to perform.

Licensed RN Students

Those RCNP participants who are registered nurses still maintain a *non-employee* status while they are working at their placement sites. It is important for these participants to find out if there are any hospital policies that prevent them from otherwise practicing within the full scope of their license.

Mid-Placement “Site Visit”

The Coordinator will make contact with you midway through your placement via a Zoom conference. The coordinator will be contacting via email with date & time options for a remote site visit. The primary reason for this visit is to learn about your preceptorship and to discuss the progress you have made toward achieving your goals and objectives. You will also give an oral patient presentation on a patient of your choosing using the outline specific to your specialty area.

Patient Presentation

You will make an oral presentation the coordinator regarding a patient that you have cared for some time during your placement. The content of this presentation will differ from the manner in which a patient is presented at the time of shift change or when giving “report.” The RCNP Patient Presentation Guidelines can be found on the RCNP website under the *Current Participants* Link. This presentation is designed to help you see your patient in the context of the bigger picture. In addition, it will assist you in better understanding your patient’s care and expected outcomes from the point of view of the physician. By better comprehending the physician’s goals in care, nurses can learn to be better communicators with our partners in care.

Post Placement

At the end of your placement, all course work must be submitted to the RCNP office by US MAIL. *Certificates of Completion* cannot be issued without a completed *Table of Hours*, signed by the preceptor and the *Student Evaluation* completed by your preceptor. Considerations for these experiences can be discussed with the Coordinator.

Postscript

Hopefully, this experience will give you an opportunity to consider rural nursing as a career option. Rural nursing has many advantages. Life in a more rural setting has much to offer people who choose to be away from the hustle and bustle of city life.

If an employment opportunity develops at the facility as a result of your preceptorship, you are under no obligation to accept the offer. RCNP hopes rural areas will benefit through participation in the program, but the facilities are also aware that there is no obligation to offer the participant a job upon completion of the preceptorship.

In the future, you will be contacted via e-mail by RCNP program staff to obtain information regarding the usefulness of the program in terms of helping you reach your goals. Your input before, during, and after placement is always welcome.

The RCNP Website has additional information, including Resume Templates that students may find beneficial as they prepare to begin their nursing careers. We encourage students to browse the CAREER PREP link on the home page for information and useful tips on resume preparation, cover letter writing, and interviews.

Thank you for your interest, your ideas, and especially your participation in the Rural California Nursing Preceptorship Program. Your commitment to nursing is evidenced by your desire to work in an independent study program like RCNP. We hope this experience gives you the professional and personal growth you are looking for. Embrace this challenge and make nursing all you want it to be!

RCNP Program Staff