Faculty Preparation for the Preceptorship Experience: The Forgotten Link

[Departments: Preceptorship]

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Preceptorship is a formal triad including the preceptor, student, and faculty: a triad referred to by Nehls et al. 1 as the learning team. Generally, preceptorship research has been focused on the perspective of preceptors or students. Because preceptorship differs from the more traditional forms of teaching, the question of faculty preceptored learning experiences is important.

Faculty Role

A review of the literature reveals three key themes relative to the faculty role in the relationship, including faculty and preceptor relationships, visitation, and evaluation. According to Gibson and Hauri, 6 preceptors needed faculty support through communication, availability, and accessibility. They required support in information, practice, expectations, and information about student strengths/weaknesses, and knowledge about curriculum, which Ferguson 5 determined they preferred to obtain directly from faculty. Corlett, 2 and Patton and Dowd 3 determined that both preceptors and faculty valued collaborative relationships, which need to be nurtured by...
faculty. Unfortunately, Corlett found that preceptors consistently perceived a lack of communication, relationship building, or information in the relationship and that neither students nor preceptors regard supervising faculty as clinically credible.

Although faculty are not directly involved in teaching preceptored students in the clinical setting, they oversee the teaching/learning process in the clinical setting. Regular prearranged faculty visitation can facilitate the preceptor/student relationship, alleviate student anxiety, ease the adjustment period, alert preceptors to student concerns, and advocate for students. Gibson and Hauri found that site visits provided faculty with a realistic view of student performance, created a medium for feedback, and permitted faculty to assess preceptor teaching. Ferguson ascertained that faculty contact prior to preceptorship commencement was important and desirable because preceptors expressed greater confidence in faculty that were familiar to them. They expressed more willingness to address student issues with a previously known faculty member present on the unit. They also expected faculty to be readily available by phone.

One necessary outcome of preceptored relationships was student evaluation, although Ferguson and Calder noted that student evaluation is the ultimate responsibility of faculty. Interestingly, Yonge and Trojan found professors rated student performance lower than preceptors. Ferguson and Calder also found differences between preceptors and faculty in their valuing of selected performance criteria, although preceptors used these criteria if they were understandable and applicable. Ferguson noted that preceptors emphasized that faculty should assume responsibility for students' final evaluations, although they were willing to provide evaluative comments about student progress.

**Studying Faculty Preparation**

This review of the literature revealed that faculty preparation for the preceptor learning experience was not addressed, thus providing the impetus for this study. The research question addressed faculty preparation to teach preceptor-based courses. The sample consisted of eight faculty assigned up to 24 preceptored students each in a 340-hour fourth year undergraduate course. They consented to a telephone interview. Data were collected on biographical profile, role preparation, and activities. A content analysis was conducted. All interviewee sample sizes. The University's Ethics Review Committee granted ethical approval...

**Lack of Faculty Preparation**

Faculty rated their preparation as inconsistent. Those well prepared attributed it to

* reading research,
* attending presentations or meetings,
* leading workshops,
* preceptoring previously,
* interacting with other faculty, and
* being familiar with the setting.
Faculty attributed lack of preparation to:

* having little information about preceptors,
* inadequate information to give to preceptors,
* unawareness of student expectations,
* no course orientation, and
* lack of evaluative support.

One faculty statement was most revealing, "just wing it...got the course outline and just went for it...had to figure it out on my own." Faculty contact with students ranged from two to three times per week to once every 2 weeks, and with preceptors, from two to three times per week (rarely) to once a month. One faculty expressed the need for clearer evaluative guidelines, more explicit expectations of faculty, and time to assist the preceptor in evaluating students.

**Faculty Tasks**

Faculty cited particular behaviors as commonplace in their role including supporting students and preceptors, communicating curriculum trends, and ensuring students' knowledge application. Others identified less common behaviors such as developing preceptorship materials, monitoring student immunizations, matching students and preceptors, coordinating student needs and preceptor skills, and organizing extracurricular activities for international students. Activities that were identified as administrative, for which faculty should not be responsible, included scheduling preceptor or student time, balancing or compiling placements, garnering student criminal record checks, and responding to professional organizational requests.

When asked how they prepared the preceptor, faculty described meeting with the preceptor, reviewing course outlines, assessing preceptor critical thinking, written materials and expectations, organizing workshops, discussing conflict scenarios, relaying input about students, and preparing them for the preceptee role.

**Conclusions**

This study demonstrated faculty attributes insufficient preparation to facilitate preceptorship-based courses, especially as ultimate responsibility for preceptor, preparation and supervision rest directly with faculty. This study demonstrated that without faculty preparation, preparation of preceptors was inconsistent. One faculty identified evaluation as an issue, concerning with the concern raised by preceptors.

Various references to the importance of faculty visitations were revealed in the literature, and evidenced in the engagement of these faculty in regular visitations. Generally, faculty tended to view their role and the preceptors' as a dichotomy. They viewed themselves as clinicians, student supporters, and knowledge facilitators within the preceptorship.
Preparation of faculty for preceptorships is consequential for positive learning experiences. Workshops are necessary to address pertinent issues such as preparation for preceptorship teaching, standards of performance, resource development with preceptors, and faculty self-evaluation with the preceptorship method of teaching. Although preceptorship may appear to be a peripheral method of teaching, it is nevertheless a powerful experience for students, preceptors, and faculty, and is worthy of curricular and faculty attention.

References


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