

The Development and Implementation of an Effective Outpatient Oncology New Graduate Nurse Orientation Program

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Historically, outpatient oncology settings have not hired new graduate RNs (NG-RNs). However, with staffing shortages, outpatient oncology clinics have hired NG-RNs who required orientation from formal onboarding programs. Using a mix of didactic instruction, hands-on rotation experiences, and nursing leadership support, an NG-RN orientation program was developed to attract, support, and professionally train NG-RNs in the outpatient setting. Based on this program's results, NG-RNs improved their competence and confidence within their first year of practice in the outpatient oncology setting.

AT A GLANCE

- NG-RNs can be effectively prepared to practice in the outpatient oncology setting with a structured orientation program.
- Providing specialized training to outpatient preceptors is a critical aspect of an orientation program and can facilitate NG-RNs' confidence.
- Long-term nursing retention rates may improve with the development of a dedicated orientation for outpatient NG-RNs.

KEYWORDS

new graduate RN; outpatient oncology; oncology transition to practice

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The U.S. Department of Labor (2023) reported that the employment of RNs will grow 6% over the next 10 years, with 193,100 openings projected each year for the next decade. This gap is multifocal: the inability of nursing schools to meet the training demand for graduate nurses to enter the profession, an aging population that increases healthcare demand, and the retirement of nurses. In addition, the nursing profession has an experience–complexity gap, resulting in an increase of experienced nurses leaving organizations and an influx of novice nurses to backfill the open positions (Nursing Executive Center, 2019). These issues have forced the profession to reconsider traditional workforce requirements and training opportunities.

Historically, new graduate RNs (NG-RNs) were guided to seek employment for their first nursing position on inpatient units to gain experience, build a solid foundation of skills, understand the patient experience, and receive mentorship from experienced nurses (Mota et al., 2007). Contrarily, outpatient settings hired nurses with inpatient experience. As healthcare treatments and procedures transition into outpatient settings and the U.S. nursing shortage continues, the need for more nurses in these settings has increased and outpaces the number of experienced nurses seeking outpatient employment (Nursing Executive Center, 2019). From 2005 to 2015, U.S. inpatient stays decreased by 6.6%, and visits to outpatient areas increased by 14% (Abrams et al., 2018). The increased visits, gross outpatient revenue per visit, and increased capital investments in outpatient facilities demonstrate the shift from in-hospital services to outpatient care delivery (Abrams et al., 2018). This trend has been particularly apparent in oncology where many complex or highly-reactive infusions and procedures have shifted to the outpatient setting, therefore increasing outpatient volumes (Aljurf et al., 2021).

To meet demand, the Nursing Executive Center (2019) has recommended hiring NG-RNs into outpatient settings and providing outpatient-specific training and onboarding to orient them to this clinical practice setting. Therefore, the Duke University Health System's National Cancer Institute–designated cancer center developed an outpatient orientation program to support NG-RNs