How can it be June already? We are halfway through the year! If we were to operate the calendar year the same as the fiscal year, we could say we have already spent half our money and produced (or established mechanisms to produce) half our outcomes. However, we don’t operate on the basis of 1/12th of the whole effort happening each month, and June is a big month in continuing education.

Educators in academic settings have been drilling into the minds of new graduates the point that learning is lifelong—and that idea is also one of the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) report, The Future of Nursing (2010). Senior nursing students are always excited to “get out into practice,” so the idea of lifelong learning is either greeted as a wonderful opportunity to be tapped frequently and primarily in the work setting or it is seen as a message falling on deaf ears. Either way, most new graduates want to test their skills and knowledge.

Educators in service settings eagerly (or not) await the onset of the latest group of graduates to integrate into their organization. It isn’t as if new graduates appear only once per year, but June is a big month for such production. All new graduates will need some kind of transitional education.

Only a few of those graduates will have the opportunity to experience a residency program (another of the IOM recommendations). Those residency programs are intense, both in terms of selection of participants and implementation of the program itself. Work is gearing up!

And then there is the vast majority of experiences themselves. Orientation, which varies widely, sometimes consists of understanding the physical layout and key rules. Then, submersion, sometimes with an assigned staff member, begins. This type of education exists in places where groups of new employees aren’t added at one time or at places where little, if any, effort is placed into the continued learning of employees. This approach illustrates that we haven’t made consistent progress in addressing the needs for new graduates to practice safely.

New graduates should expect—and they deserve—a substantive orientation to an organization. Key questions to ask about the organization during orientation include: What is it about, how does it work, what are the standards of care, who are the supporters of new graduates, where is the latest information about employment and practice found, when is it necessary and desirable to enlist the aid of someone else, and why are certain practices considered sacred at this organization? These questions are sometimes not covered in any type of orientation program. Even those organizations with residency programs don’t consistently provide that information to all of its recently employed new graduate nurses.

So, June provides us with an opportunity to reflect on what we are doing as a specialty within nursing to further the goals of the IOM in the area of residency programs and lifelong learning. If we aren’t doing something, we are missing an opportunity!

REFERENCE

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