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Mentorship in Nursing: Reflections from Students and Mentors

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Background



- integration of newly graduated nurses into the systems of multisectoral and multidisciplinary collaboration within provision of primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare → **demanding process**
- a requirement to integrate future nurses, the nursing students, into the healthcare – and particularly nursing – teams already during their undergraduate education

→ the need for **active participation of nurses** from clinical nursing practice **in the professional preparation** and **practical training of nursing students**

- *section 4, 6, 7 of A WHO European Strategy for Nursing and Midwifery Education (2000; document EUR/00/5019309/15)*
- *WHO European Strategy for Nursing and Midwifery Education. Section 1 – 8 Guidelines for Member States on the implementation of the strategy (2001; document EUR/01/5019304)*
- *Decree of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic No. 208/2024 Coll. on the scope of nursing practice provided by a nurse...*
- *Concept of Health Care in the Field of Nursing (2023)*



MENTORSHIP

Mentorship in nursing



NURSE-MENTOR (specifically prepared; PCNE) → effective guidance of nursing students within their professional training:

- development of students' clinical competences (= a pillar of healthcare education)
- objective assessment of clinical competences
- coordination of teaching in real conditions of clinical practice (clinical placement)
- integration of students into the interdisciplinary team

→ **the involvement of nurse-mentors in teaching** (clinical and practical nursing subjects, practical training or nursing practice, and continuous summer or winter practice) ~ **the call for:**

- strengthening effective interdisciplinary clinical teaching and its reflection by students
- increasing nursing students' interest to work in healthcare or in specific healthcare facilities that contributed to their professional development
- enabling more effective selection and recruitment of employees, or their profiling already during undergraduate education
- stabilising the number of nurses in the healthcare facilities or within specific departments



Department of Nursing at JF MED CU



Mentors preparation / training

accredited PCNE

since 2008

re-accredited à **5 years**

100 → **50 hours**

8 → **24 credits**

155 active nurse-mentors in UNM (± 10)

surgical / internal medicine / intensive
care / paediatric / mental health units

cooperation between JFMED + UNM

INDIVIDUAL MENTORSHIP

319 graduated nurse-mentors

18. cycle of PCNE (+ **18 new**)

> **190** prepared for local
University Hospital Martin
(UNM)

Summer Practice 1 (160 h)

Summer Practice 2 (240 h)

Nursing Practice 2 (224 h)

Winter Practice (240 h)

Nursing Practice 3 (224 h)

1088 hours

guidance + assessment

PORTFOLIO

System of mentoring nursing students in clinical placements



EXPLORE MENTORSHIP IN NURSING



IDENTIFY POSITIVE / NEGATIVE ASPECTS
(perceived characteristics, expectations, benefits, and challenges)



from the perspectives of:

- nursing students
- mentors
- the management

of a selected clinical setting at a Slovak university hospital
(Clinic of Neonatology at UNM)



Aim of
QUAL
descriptive study
(2024)



purposive sampling

two FOCUS GROUPS
(7 mentors; 7 students)

one in-depth SEMI-STRUCTURED
INTERVIEW with the head nurse

informed consent
audio + video records
verbatim transcript

thematic analysis
(Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013)



Methods



Results

POSITIVE aspects / BENEFITS

(S + M)

Fostering of students' confidence and self-assurance (S+M)

Integration into the team (S+M)

Development of professionalism (S+M)

Expectations

Mentors' patience (S)

Friendly vs professional mentee-mentor relationship (S + M)

NEGATIVE aspects / CHALLENGES

(S + M)

Pressure experienced (S)

Limited time for students (S+M)

Restricted local clinical placements (S)

Financial recognition for mentors (S+M)

What will the mentor be like?

Writing the feed-back in portfolio

Being re-assigned to other nurses (S+M)

Feeling lonely (assigned to a mentor, yet essentially alone) (S)

Fostering of students' confidence and self-assurance

→ for students (S), confidence, a sense of security, and self-assurance are crucial, while mentors (M) consider reinforcing these qualities essential

S2: *"Mentors give me **a sense of security**... when I'm not sure about my performance, I know they always support me."*

S4: *"I have someone to rely on, I feel more confident... I need someone to tell me: yes, this is how you should do it..."*

S6: *"For me, **having a sense of certainty is crucial**... and **knowing that I can reach out to [the mentor] when something's going on**."*

S7: *"The greatest benefit for me is that **mentors gave me confidence and self-assurance** in performing tasks and interventions... We repeated them even hundred times until I was finally sure how to do them correctly."*

M6 explained these feelings are very important: *"We get to know each other, trust is developed, and... **the student's fears and stress are reduced, so they gradually feel more confident**."*

A sense of confidence is crucial for improving the quality of learning and performance of nursing students (Hauge et al. 2019), therefore, it is necessary to create a safe environment in which students feel comfortable while learning and performing nursing tasks. Frøiland et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of the mentor in strengthening students' self-confidence and enhancing their sense of security during clinical practice.

Integration into the team

→ integration of the student into the team, repeatedly highlighted as a positive aspect of mentoring, strengthens the student's self-confidence, acceptance by the staff and engagement; mentors (M) also perceive it as beneficial and actively promote it

S4: *„I really enjoy... when my mentor involves me in the team and the ward's daily routine. Then I feel I'm truly helping and being useful... that what I'm doing makes sense.“*

S1: *“When mentor includes me in the team, I feel confident, and... not stressed about the practice. This placement [neonatology] is the best in my whole studies – I get to perform nursing tasks instead of just changing beds or disinfecting surfaces all the day...?!“*

S5 values when mentor introduces her to the whole team: *“...I am not just a student getting in the way... I feel accepted as part of the team.“*

M4: *“I always try to integrate my student into the team... so that others can support her when needed.“*

M5: *“Everyone in the team has their own tasks... including students gives them responsibilities too ...thus makes them feel valued.“*

Smith et al. (2024) found integration into the team improves practical skills and supports students' social and professional integration, helping them better understand the nurse's role and develop teamwork skills. On the other hand, stress and pressure due to ineffective communication and problems within team dynamics can lead to negative experiences if students are unable to communicate effectively or feel isolated within the team (Bogo et al. 2012).

Development of professionalism

→ students regard the development of professionalism as a key element of mentoring, acknowledging that skilled mentors enhance their professional performance and broaden their clinical competences – and they expressed gratitude for their guidance

- S1:** *"I can't imagine clinical practice without a mentor. I'd probably be lost, thrown into the deep end... I've become more confident in performing procedures, I do them better, and I feel that I'm improving. Mentors help me build professionalism."*
- S3:** *"We can really be grateful that we have mentors... even though sometimes complain about it. I can't imagine it without them... I also have that exact feeling of professionalism, that now I can see associations, link concepts, and understand how everything fits together..."*
- S6:** *"At first, I was like... why we needed mentors on placement ?! But soon I realized... it's actually great, and a huge advantage... They [mentors] always involved me, and I felt like a little professional, improving with every shift... Mentorship makes our placements far more valuable than at other faculties..."*
- HN:** *„The benefit of mentorship is professional development...both for the nurses and for the students who have potential and are developing their professionalism."*

Makhaya et al. (2023) emphasize that mentoring of high quality helps students develop practical skills and theoretical knowledge, while strengthening their professionalism.

EXPECTATIONS

Mentors' patience

- patience was highlighted by both groups
- students (S) perceive patience as essential for a good mentee-mentor relationship; expressed that a mentor's ability to be patient helps them adapt more quickly, feel more confident, and contributes to the effectiveness of learning and their overall well-being during clinical practice
- mentors (M) understand its importance and try to apply it actively when guiding the students

S₂: *"It's important for me that my mentor helps me, and above all... is patient."*

S₁: *"I think mentors should be patient..."*

M₃ stated she learned to be more patient during mentorship course: *"When I'm more patient, it's easier for students to learn..."*

M₂: *"I have to be patient and accept that a task I could do in minutes takes much longer when working with a student..."*

Smith et al. (2024) report that a mentor's patience is one of the most important characteristics influencing students' learning and development. They also found that patient mentors improve the efficiency of the educational process. Similarly, Jacobsen et al. (2022) state that a higher level of mentor patience leads to better student learning and increased engagement in the learning process.

EXPECTATIONS

Friendly vs professional mentee-mentor relationship

→ perceptions of the mentee-mentor relationship ranged from friendly to professional: both groups emphasized mutual trust, understanding, and respect, while students (S) tend to expect a more friendly relationship, whereas mentors (M) strive to keep the relationship at a professional level

S2: "For me, *it's important when a mentor is friendly*. Then I look forward to practice... When *they're approachable*, it's great!"

S3: "A *friendly relationship is important*... I see my current *mentor as an authority*, but at the same time *we get along very well and share a lot of laughs*."

S4 described also the opposite experience, highlighting how a mentor should not behave: "I had *friendly mentors*, and *it was great working with them*. But also... I had one really bad mentor – she was *so haughty and arrogant*. I don't understand why she became a mentor! *There was no relationship between us*. Well, there was... I was *afraid of her*, and I think *she enjoyed that*."

M6: "The *foundation is trust*, a kind and friendly approach, but we *must always remain professional*."

M8: "I tried to create a *professional yet friendly relationship* with my student... And *it was nice, it worked*..."

M5: "...*not to build overly friendly relationships – it's important to maintain a professional one*."

NEGATIVES

Pressure experienced (S)

What will the mentor be like?

- S1:** *"That stress... wondering who I'll be assigned to...? I'm most stressed when I go for my first shift, worrying whether [the mentor] won't be nervous."*
- S2:** *"When I don't know what to expect, I get butterflies in my stomach..."*
- S4:** *"The stress of thinking the mentor might be unapproachable – it would be hard for me to work with someone like that."*
- S5:** *"It's definitely stressful since I don't know who it will be... I always check Facebook to see what the mentor looks like, whether they're smiling in photos... sometimes I form a first impression from the pictures, which isn't always accurate, as reality may differ..."*
- S6** unlike the others: *"I don't get stressed... Only once, when I had a male mentor assigned, I was a bit stressed wondering what he would be like, since I was used to mostly female nurses."*
- occasionally, certain situations or well-intentioned gestures can also provoke uncertainty or stress in students – **S5:** *"Once my mentor offered to switch to informal address, but I didn't feel comfortable and got stressed of it... I preferred to keep addressing her formally. I see her as an authority."*

Students most frequently discussed stress or pressure experienced in connection with

- first meeting with their assigned mentor
- mentor's personality and behavior

→ stress faded away after the first meeting and first shifts working together

Li et al. (2011) point out the negative effects of stress, which can influence students' motivation and self-confidence.

NEGATIVES

Pressure experienced (S) Writing the feed-back in portfolio

S5: *"I don't like that the mentor has to see and sign my written feedback about them. It makes me **afraid to write honestly**, because they'll read it... I understand that it's meant to be joint feedback and possibly to resolve conflicts, but I just can't say it to their face..."*

S4: *"I couldn't objectively evaluate that one terrible mentor... as she read it after me. I was **scared and stressed because of her**. I couldn't write the truth there...!"*

S3: *"Once I had a really bad mentor, I felt awful and **often cried**. At the end of the placement, I wanted to write objective criticism even though I knew she would read it... In the end, she handled it herself, because **she dictated the entire mentor feedback to me, so I wrote exactly what she wanted...**"*

→ students suggest that feedback on a mentor should be written with no additional review by the mentor; they suggested that at the end of the placement, mentor feedback should be submitted exclusively to the school to address potential issues

Students discussed stress or pressure experienced in connection with

- writing the feed-back in portfolio

Onieva-Zafra et al. (2020) emphasize that since the relationship between student and mentor is crucial for professional development, it is important to minimize stress, as it may have long-term negative impacts on students' professional satisfaction and career growth.

NEGATIVES

Limited time for students (S+M)

Being re-assigned to other nurses (S+M)

→ both groups acknowledged that having enough time for the student is a key precondition for effective individual mentoring, but it is not always met (mentors who are day-shift managers = charge nurses) → the reassignment of students to other nurses during a shift

S₄: *"I don't like it when mentors, especially charge nurses, don't have time for us and assign us to other nurses on the shift. They aren't mentors, so why should they be responsible for us?!"*

S₇: *"Then it ends up that I'm with someone different on every shift..."*

S₁: *"... many times I felt like I didn't really belong to anyone."*

However, S₆ and S₄ did not want to generalize in this context:

S₆: *"On the contrary, I had a positive experience with some charge nurses. It depends... on the person and how they organize things..."*

S₄: *"Really, my mentor, the charge nurse, doesn't pay much attention to me because she has so many other duties. But I can't say a single bad word... The other nurses, if they see that I'm interested, they let me do almost everything..."*

M (charge nurse): *"Sometimes I am forced to assign them to the nurses on shift... sometimes I'm really pressed for time because of other duties."*

Time for effective student supervision enhances the quality of mentoring and supports the development of nursing students (Smith et al. 2024).

NEGATIVES

Limited time for students (S)
Feeling lonely (assigned to a mentor, yet essentially alone) (S)

→ two students described negative experiences in previous placements, where they worked with no guidance from their mentors, who had no time, willingness, or interest in them – they reflected that such placements did not offer them opportunities to learn new skills and competences

S3: "**My mentor had no time...** we were there on our own, **nobody paid attention to us. The placement was pointless!**"

S5: "It's not right if nurses are forced to be mentors... then do it unwillingly. Then **we're left on placement alone and don't learn anything...**"

Restricted local clinical placements (S)

→ two students viewed negatively that they could not complete their clinical placements in their hometowns. Aware that most trained mentors are based at the UNM, they call for more mentors to be available in other hospitals

S1: "...would be **great if there were mentors in our nearby hospitals ...**"

S6: "**I don't like that we can't do our placement at home...** It's uncomfortable for those of us living in the dorms... thus even during Christmas we spend less time at home... If there was some kind of recruitment and **if mentors were trained in other hospitals, it would be much better for us students.**"

NEGATIVES

Financial recognition for mentors (S+M)

→ theme discussed more by the students (S) than the mentors (M)

S1: *"Mentorship is not easy for nurses ; some financial rewards and additional credits should be considered."*

S2: *"I would give them fair compensation... it's extra work..."*

S5: *"I'd increase their bonuses... they carry a lot of responsibility!"*

S4 reflected differently taking another aspect into consideration: *"Mentors should be better paid, but that might also attract those who aren't really suitable for it..."*

M5: *"... should be greater recognition and appreciation of mentors – both among colleagues and within the team... and some benefits, so we're not exhausted... maybe a few paid days off, or higher financial compensation. Otherwise, there won't be much interest in mentorship, because... we do it alongside our regular work."*

HN: *"I try to motivate nurses to take part in the mentorship programme by assuring them they will be financially rewarded."*

Mentorship in nursing

- many benefits
 - important to identify and address the negative aspects perceived by all the parties involved
 - efforts should focus on minimizing negative influences within established structures and maximizing its benefits for nursing students
 - optimizing clinical placements and conditions of mentorship, addressing challenges such as placement planning, mentor selection, and mentor recognition
 - ✓ to enhance mentorship effectiveness and sustainability, to fully harness its potential
 - ✓ to strengthen professional preparation of nursing students and improve meeting their learning outcomes
- one of the first pilot and preliminary studies to provide feedback on all the activities we carry out within nursing mentorship in our department
- **the MentorLab project**, as prepared, could offer solutions



Conclusion



Thank you for your attention...



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