

Looking at the Other Side: A Literature Review of the Senior Nurse's Mentoring Experience

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Abstract

Senior nurses play a critical role in supporting the professional development of newly graduated nurses (NGNs) as they transition to practice. In Canada, high NGN attrition rates have contributed to the nursing shortage, necessitating further exploration of the experience of those supporting NGNs to improve retention.

The purpose of this narrative literature review is to establish relevant background regarding senior nurses' experience and needs in supporting NGNs in Alberta. The literature was searched for primary scholarly sources and reviews published between 2015 and 2025 including senior nurses' experience in roles supporting NGNs, NGNs' transition experience, and the relationship between both groups. The literature was searched for peer-reviewed, English-language sources using the Athabasca University Library and Scholarly Resources search. Literature was first searched within Canada, however, due to very limited findings regarding senior nurses' experience, the search of this subject was expanded to include global literature. Articles examining experiences of nursing students or academic faculty were excluded. An additional online search was conducted to identify retention strategies in Alberta to support NGN transition to practice and resources for senior nurses to carry out their supportive roles.

A total of 25 articles were identified that explored senior nurses' and NGN experiences. Articles were located in the following databases: CINAHL Plus with Full Text, Directory of Open Access Journals,

PubMed, and ScienceDirect. The search identified 15 relevant studies exploring experiences of senior nurses working with NGNs; however, only one was a Canadian study. Senior nurses describe challenges in supporting NGNs, citing heavy workloads, feeling unsupported and undervalued with unclear expectations and inadequate resources. Enablers for senior nurses to effectively carry out their role include manageable workloads, role recognition and clarity, training and resources. Of the identified articles, 10 were relevant to the experience of NGNs during transition to practice in Canada. Included were seven primary research articles, one needs assessment, and two reviews that included Canadian studies. NGNs experience challenges of feeling overwhelmed, having low self-confidence, and unsupportive workplaces. They expect to be supported by senior nurses in practice, but instead may face high expectations of their abilities, experience bullying, lateral violence, and inadequate or ineffective guidance and mentorship from senior nurses. NGNs require consistent and adequate support from senior nurses to effectively transition to practice. Some retention strategies and resources for NGNs in Alberta were identified, yet very few resources were located for senior nurses.

There is a dearth of Canadian literature examining senior nurses' experiences and understanding of their role supporting the transition of NGNs. Yet, their role is crucial to ensuring effective and sustainable support that enhances NGN integration and promotes patient safety. Further research can guide the development of policy and inform practice based on the needs of senior nurses to create more supportive work environments. With adequate guidance, resources, and clear expectations, senior nurses can effectively mentor and teach NGNs. Ultimately, ensuring the needs of senior nurses in supportive roles are met can improve NGN transition and retention for both NGNs and senior nurses.

Keywords: senior nurse, newly graduated nurse, transition to practice, mentorship, preceptorship



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