Management and Reporting of Performance Concerns for Student Nurses on Clinical Placement at RCH

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This document was based on recommendations from a KPMG audit: “The Royal Children’s Hospital, Internal audit report of Undergraduate Nurse Placement Program” September, 2009 and updated to reflect contemporary practice.

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This edition updated by Stacey Richards with acknowledgments to Priscilla Stephenson & Laura Brooks.

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Management and reporting of performance concerns for student nurses on clinical placement at the RCH

Overview

The purpose of this procedure is to provide a framework for Preceptors, Clinical Nurse Educators, Clinical Support Nurses and the Nurse Educator, Undergraduate in the management and reporting of performance concerns encountered with undergraduate nursing students completing a clinical placement at the RCH.

The procedure deals with performance concerns at three levels. The aim of each level is to prevent an escalation of the problem, but allows the user to understand what to do next if the problems persist.

These levels are:
1. Early detection.
2. Ongoing or escalation: of performance concerns.

Maintaining documentation and providing appropriate support to student nurses exhibiting performance concerns are also outlined at the end of this document.

Definition of Terms

Clinical placement - The course component of the Bachelor of Nursing or entry to practice Masters in Nursing, taken outside the University within a health care facility where clinical education is undertaken through direct supervision by a Preceptor (or a clinical teacher).

Performance concerns - unsatisfactory performance, demonstrated by the student nurse. This may be in the context of skills, abilities, application of knowledge, inappropriate behaviour, poor attitude and/or demonstration of values not in alignment with RCH expectations and code of conduct whilst on clinical placement.

Student Nurse - An individual who is currently undertaking a Bachelor of Nursing or Master of Nursing Science degree at a University and is taking part in a clinical placement at RCH as part of that course. Also called entry to professional practice student.

Preceptor - A Registered Nurse who is formally assigned to provide transitional support and supervision for an agreed upon period of time to a nursing student through education, role modelling and socialisation. Enrolled Nurses (EN) are not able to supervise student nurses as the EN scope requires them to work under the supervision of a Registered Nurse.

Education Team - Clinical Nurse Educators (CNE) and Clinical Support Nurses (CSN)
Clinical Challenge – A process commenced for student nurses who are at risk of failing clinical placement. The process provides and documents objective and clear goals and feedback, with set timeframes to allow accurate and transparent evaluation of student performance. Clinical challenges are implemented in conjunction with the University and are an important step prior to a student being deemed not to have successfully meet placement requirements.

Procedure Details

1. Management of performance concerns

1.1. Early Detection

It is important to identify at an early stage, student nurses who demonstrate unsatisfactory behaviour or skills that may indicate future performance concerns. The purpose of this is to identify additional learning needs of the student, provide timely feedback, support and guidance to prevent further escalation of issues.

Examples that may indicate future concern of a student's performance include:

- turning up late for work
- distracted, un-motivated or disinterested
- inability to initiate care within scope of practice
- failure to complete clinical learning objectives or has difficulty formulating clinical learning objectives
- struggling with time management

Clinical Support Process

Preceptors

- Highlight student nurse of concern to the ward/unit CNE/CSN and explain performance concerns that have arisen.
- Document any missed shifts as per University requirements on University documentation if necessary. Notify CNE/CSN regarding this.
- Discuss concerns directly with the student or work with CNE/CSN to discuss the issues together with the student. Feedback should be timely, objective and provide clear clinical/professional examples. Upon conclusion of the discussion regarding concerns a plan should be agreed upon by all parties which outlines how improvements to practice can be achieved.
- Daily end of shift feedback and debriefing between preceptors, student, +/- CNE/CSN should be made a priority to ensure clear and open lines of communication regarding ongoing progress.
- Document progress and feedback on the ‘record of student progress’ form.
CNE/CSN

- Increase support of the Preceptor and student nurse as appropriate
- Ensure documentation regarding progress and feedback on the ‘Record of Student Progress’ form.
- Notify Nurse Educator, Undergraduate of need to monitor the situation
- Support Preceptor to discuss concerns directly with the student.

Nurse Educator, Undergraduates

- Meet with CNE/CSN and/or preceptor to discuss concerns and ensure strategies to improve have been communicated with student.
- Increase support of student and ensure they have a clear understanding of need to improve performance. Explore factors which may be influencing performance (i.e. personal issues, illness etc.) and encourage student to seek additional support as necessary and appropriate.
- Commence documentation on ‘record of student progress’ if not already done so by CNE/CNS.
- Consider the need to discuss concerns with University.

1.2. Ongoing or Escalation of Performance Concerns

In the instance where the above issues persist and/or escalate, increased intervention will be necessary. Examples of the need for further intervention may include:

- Missing shifts without adequate explanation
- Problems with clinical practice i.e. not meeting learning objectives or passing clinical assessments.
- Student at risk of failing placement as not meeting University requirements set out on Clinical Appraisal Tool.

Clinical Support Process

Preceptor

- Report lack of improvement to the CNE/CSN.
- Participate in meetings with CNE/CSN and Nurse Educator, Undergraduates as appropriate.
- In conjunction with CNE/CSN Continue to provide daily feedback to the student nurse regarding performance, progress and strategies for to improve practice.
- Continue to document progress and feedback on the ‘record of student progress’ form.
CNE/CSN

- Continue to work closely to support the Preceptor;
- Set specific goals and boundaries of expectations with this individual, a written plan of these may be appropriate.
- In collaboration with the Nurse Educator, Undergraduate provide verbal notice of the need to improve in the identified areas of underperformance in order to successfully meet the requirements of clinical placement.
- Ensure the verbal notice is adequately documented on the students University clinical assessment tool or university paperwork as appropriate.
- Inform the NUM of ongoing concerns and action taken.
- Continue with ‘record of student progress’ documentation to reflect strategies being implemented.
- Consider the need to spend time working clinically with the student nurse i.e. preparing medications, planning the shift, practicing handover.

Nurse Educator, Undergraduates

- Contact appropriate University nominee to highlight student issues and consult on ways to resolve performance concerns. It is likely a ‘clinical challenge’ will need to be commenced.
- Update documentation to ‘record of student progress’ regarding University communication.
- Meet with student +/- CNE/CSN/Preceptor to discuss ongoing concerns, provide support and discuss strategies for improved practice.
- Provide support and assistance if other life stressors are influencing performance (further information below).
- Consider the need to spend time working clinically with the student nurse i.e. preparing medications, planning the shift, practicing handover.
- Review alternative options such as change of preceptor/ward if evidence of personality conflict exists.
- Inform Director of Nursing Education of the developing problem.

1.3. Significant Performance Concerns

Examples of issues that indicate a student is not improving in their clinical placement and are in danger of not successfully meeting the requirements of placement include,
- Unsatisfactory clinical performance despite feedback and strategies to improve
- Lack of time management
• Demonstrates unprofessional communication and conduct
• Has not met learning objectives
• Demonstrates unsafe behaviour
• Student at not meeting University requirements set out on Clinical Appraisal Tool and/or not meeting requirements of ‘clinical challenge’.

Clinical Support Process

Preceptor
• Education Team to guide preceptor involvement going forward

CNE/CSN
• CNE/CSN to take over responsibility of undergraduate nurse in consultation with Nurse Educator, Undergraduates.
• Collaborate with Nurse Educator, Undergraduate to implement a strategy for working with the undergraduate nurse.
• Work with the student nurse for improvement in identified areas within defined timeframe.
• Ensure all verbal feedback is documented in the students University clinical assessment tool and ‘record of student progress’ form.
• Update NUM on status of performance concern with undergraduate nurse and agreed action moving forward.
• Provide feedback to Preceptor on proposed future action for professional development purposes.

Nurse Educator, Undergraduate
• The Undergraduate Nurse Educator to work closely with appropriate University nominee on action to be taken for resolution of performance concerns in consultation with Director of Nursing Education.
• Provide a further verbal notice of the need to improve in the identified areas of underperformance in order to be deemed competent and the potential implication of failing their placement with one further warning. Document this on either the students Clinical Appraisal Tool or ‘clinical challenge’ paperwork.
• If there is no improvement of performance issues as identified during the agreed timeframe, the undergraduate nurse will be deemed to have failed their clinical placement.
• Ensure appropriate emotional support is provided to the student nurse throughout this process.
• If the undergraduate nurse is deemed to be unsafe and incompetent they will have their clinical placement terminated and be asked to leave the RCH.
Ensure the student nurses documents are finalised, lanyard/access cards collected and windows/EMR access cancelled.

- Ensure all decisions are made in collaboration with the University.
- Implement a formal clinical review process in consultation with Nursing Education for ongoing learning and case study purposes.
- Ensure ward (student, Preceptor, CNE/F and AUM) is closely informed of progress and agreed actions.

2. Record Keeping

To ensure there is effective communication between all relevant parties, formal documentation for the purpose of capturing any performance concerns of an undergraduate nurse whilst on clinical placement will be maintained utilising an ‘record of student progress’ form.

The aim of this documentation is to allow for improved communication between the CNE/CSNs and Nurse Educator, Undergraduate. It is to be only used for the purpose of guiding appropriate student learning and development for a student who is having difficulty in their clinical placement. In the event a student is not successfully meeting the requirements of their placement, this information can also be shared with the University as a record of actions taken to attempt resolution of problems. The intent is not to keep a record on every student, only those who are having difficulties, as outlined in section 1.

Documentation regarding a student nurse's performance so should commence as soon as performance concerns are highlighted. This can be done by either a preceptor, CNE/CSN or by the Nurse Educator, Undergraduate. This form needs to be used in conjunction with existing University clinical assessments and paperwork.

The form is to be used for the purposes stated above only. It is to be kept for the year the placement took place and then discarded.

3. Student Nurse Support

Management of performance concerns can be a stressful experience for student nurses and are often precipitated by other life stressors such as illness, family concerns etc. It is therefore imperative that whilst working through the clinical support process students are provide adequate emotional support and made aware of other appropriate support services.

Concerns regarding the student nurses health and/or wellbeing should be communicated to the Nurse Educator, Undergraduates who will escalate concerns with the Director of Nursing Education and the University as needed.

Regular debriefing is an important aspect of student support. A student nurse who is requiring increased clinical support may benefit from one – one debriefing with the Nurse Educator, Undergraduates. This can be a time to explore other life stressors which may be affecting clinical performance, provide
information regarding supports available and if needed complete a safety check with regards to the student's wellbeing.

Additional supports to make students aware of include:

- Speaking with university lecturers
- Access to university counselling services
- Access to Nursing and Midwifery Health Program
- 9415 7551
- [www.nmhp.org.au](http://www.nmhp.org.au)
- Making an appointment with a GP to discuss health concerns
- Seeking support from family and friends