

# New Graduate Registered Practical Nurses' Readiness for Practice in Acute Care Settings

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# Background



Ontario has a prolonged shortage of nurses, which is expected to reach 33,000 unfilled positions by 2028, a figure beyond our current system's capacity to sustain.

The role of RPNs is essential for providing quality patient care and hospitals are a major employer of RPNs and provide essential services to many people in Ontario.

# Research Questions

**The overall research questions addressed in this study are:**

- (1) How can College RPN programs better prepare student nurses in their final semester?
- (2) What is the experience of graduate nurses as they transition into working at hospitals?
- (3) How can hospitals' transition programs be delivered to build nurses' professional capacity more effectively?



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# Methodology



We employed a cross-sectional design using a mixed methods approach. Participants completed short-answer online surveys and one-on-one virtual interviews.

**Survey sample:** 49 students, 41 graduates, and 25 preceptors.

**Interview sample:** 5 students and 5 graduates



# Participants

- We interviewed 5 students and 5 new graduates.
- We surveyed 49 students, 41 graduates, and 25 preceptors.

Students (n=49)		New Graduates (n=41)		Preceptors (n=25)	
Age	n (%)	Age	n (%)	Age	n (%)
18-24 years	18 (51%)	18-24 years	10 (40%)	25-29 years	2 (8%)
25-29 years	9 (26%)	25-29 years	5 (20%)	30-34 years	9 (36%)
30-34 years	5 (14%)	30-34 years	5 (20%)	35-39 years	4 (16%)
35-39 years	1 (3%)	35-39 years	1 (4%)	40+ years	10 (40%)
40+ years	2 (6%)	40+ years	4 (16%)		
Desired Clinical Area Upon Graduation *	n (%)	Clinical Area(s) They Work In **	n (%)	Which Clinical Area(s) Do You Work?	n (%)
Acute Care	28 (58%)	Acute care	28 (47%)	Acute care	17 (57%)
Long-term care	5 (10%)	Long-term care	13 (22%)	Long-term care	6 (20%)
Primary Care	6 (13%)	Primary care	10 (17%)	Primary care	3 (10%)
Home care	3 (6%)	Home care	8 (14%)	Home care	3 (10%)
Other	6 (13%)			Other	1 (3%)
Currently working	n (%)			Highest level of education	n (%)
Yes	22 (45%)			PN diploma	19 (76%)
No	27 (55%)			BScN (RN)	1 (4%)
				Master's Degree	2 (8%)
				PhD	2 (8%)
				Other	1 (4%)

\*not all participants answered every question

\*\*participants were able to select multiple responses



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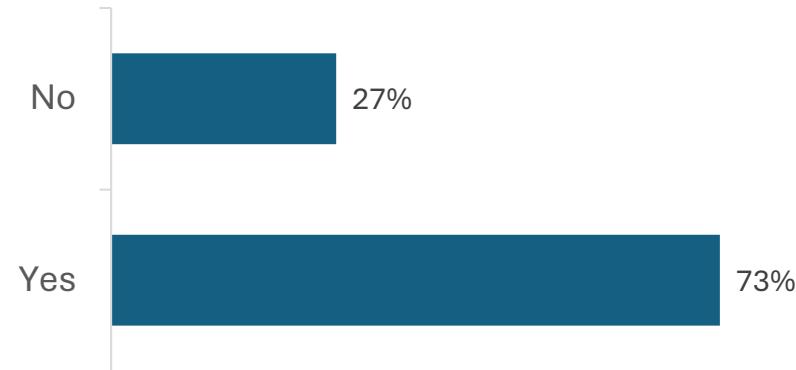
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# Survey Results: Plan on Taking Additional Education Upon Graduation

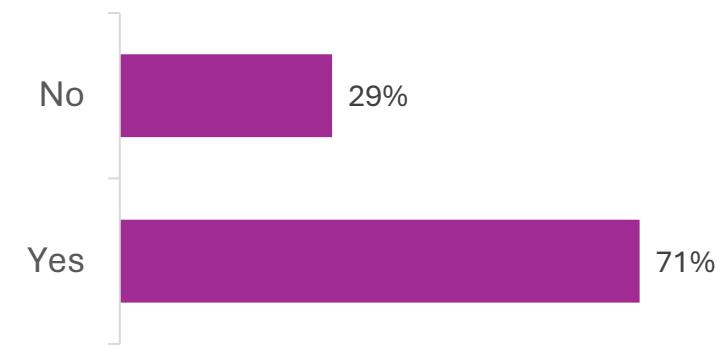
## Planning on Taking Additional Education

Students (n=49)



22 of the 36 students who plan to take additional education want to bridge to RN. Other type of education that students plan on taking included: wound care, IV initiation, OR(scrub nurses) and many others.

New Grads (n=41)

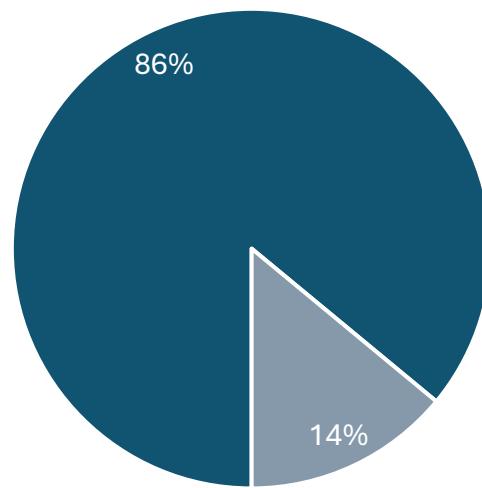


16 of 28 respondents who plan to take additional education indicate bridging to RN. Other type of education that students plan on taking included: peri-op, maternity, and many others.

# Survey Results: Did Practical Placements Prepare for Working Career?

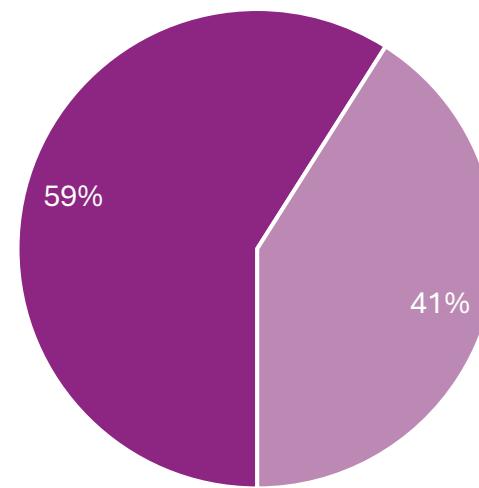
## Placements Prepared You for Your Working Career

Students (n=49)



■ Yes ■ No

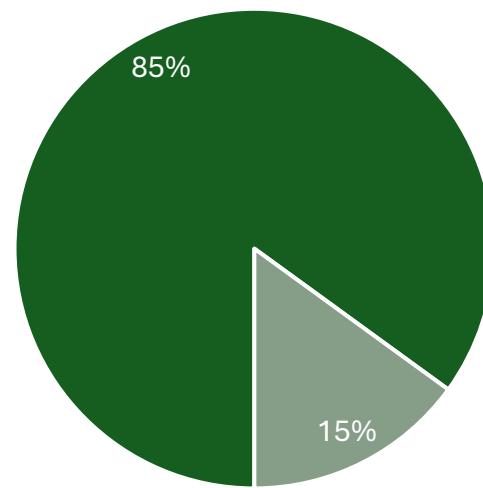
New Grads (n=41)



■ Yes ■ No

## Your Mentee Was Prepared For Their Job Upon Graduation\*

Preceptors (n=25)



■ Yes ■ No

\*not all participants answered every question

# Survey Results: Aspects of Education That Helped Meet Clinical Expectations

## Students (n=49)

Aspects of Nursing Education That Helped Meet Clinical Expectations **	n	%
Clinical placements	47	49%
Simulations	24	25%
Theory classes	19	20%
Other	5	5%

*"Lab time with a PAS. It's hands on and they provide real life insight. Clinical placements would work if they were more tailored to the students career path."*

*"I think all are very important especially clinical placements."*

## New Grads (n=41)

Aspects of Education That Helped Meet Clinical Expectations at Current Employment**	n	%
Clinical placements	37	43%
Simulations	24	28%
Theory classes	23	26%
Other	3	3%

*"Group discussions on real - life cases."*

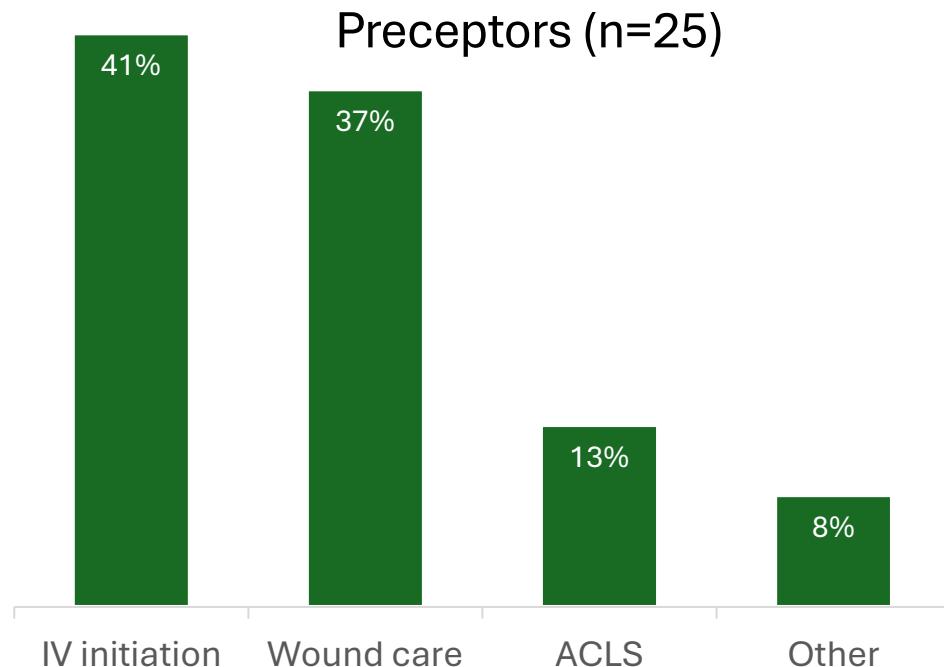
*"Guest lectures by experienced nurses."*

*"Classmates who had PSW experience."*

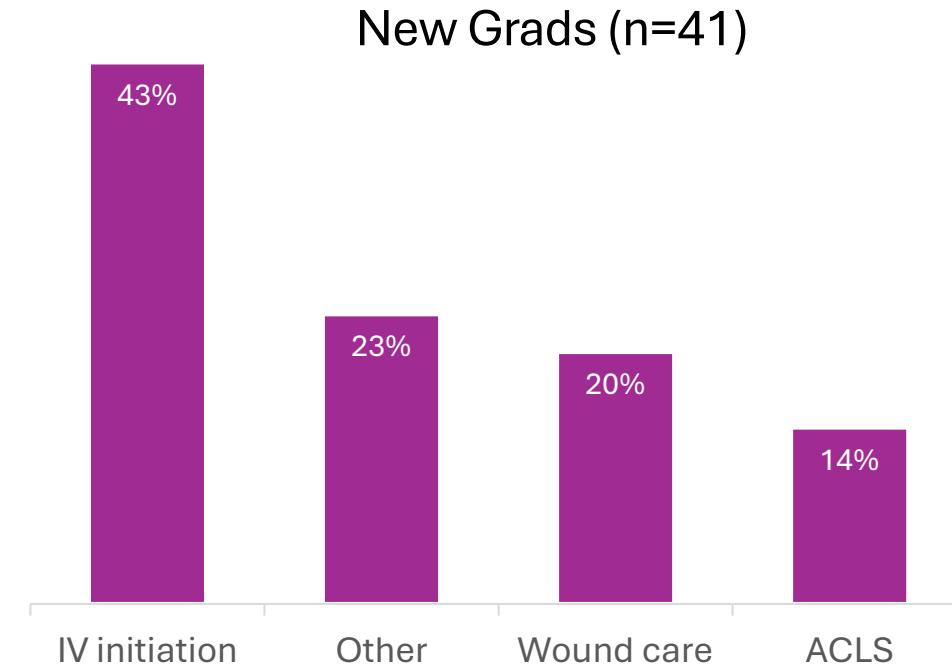
\*\*participants were able to select multiple responses

# Survey Results: Continuing Education Courses

## Continuing Education Courses Imperative to the New Graduate's Preparedness to Work \*



## Completed Continuing Education Courses as Preparation for Employment \*



Other courses included mental status, interviews, critical thinking, gentle persuasion and code scenarios.

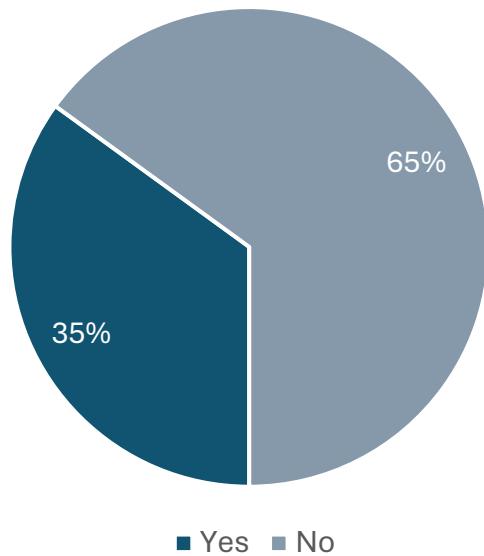
Other courses that new grads took include: Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS), ECG, TNCC, Basic Cardiac Rhythms, and more.

\*not all participants answered every question

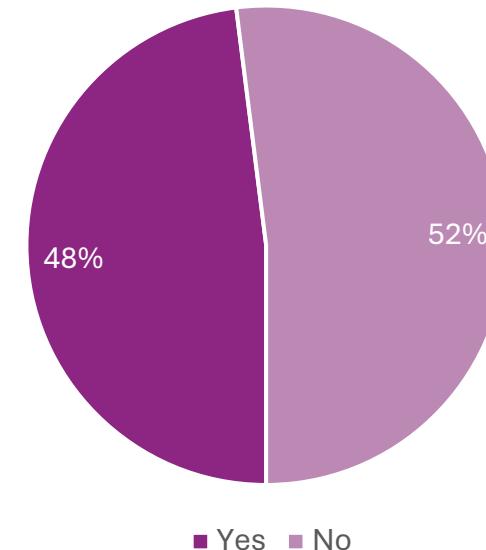
# Survey Results: Nursing and Knowledge Skills

## Concerning Final Placement, Any Specific Nursing Skills or Knowledge That Would Have Better Prepared Your Transition? \*

Students (n=49)



New Grads (n=41)



*"We should all be able to complete are final placement in a hospital as transitioning from a LTC to a hospital is vastly different from going from a hospital to LTC."*

*"Being able to have had more hands on experience with skills."  
"IV medication administration, wound care."*

\*not all participants answered every question

# Survey Results: Nursing and Knowledge Skills

## New Grads (n=41)

### What Other Supports Helped You To Complete Your Final Placement/ Starting Your New Career?

*"Support from other nurses, both senior and other new graduates."*

*"Working as an extern."*

*"My preceptor was a very experienced nurse."*

*"Hospital Orientation."*

*"Connecting with peers. Having worked at current workplace as a PSW."*

*"Self study through various online resources and peers help."*

# Survey Results: Knowledge and Clinical Skills

## Preceptors (n=25)

Any Gaps in Your New Graduate's Knowledge in Relation to Their Ability to Work *	n	%
Yes	7	35%
No	13	65%
Any Gaps in Clinical Skills in Your New Graduate's Ability to Function Within a Nursing Role *	n	%
Yes	6	30%
No	14	70%

*"They need more hands-on clinical experience. I am often confident in their ability. New nurse needs encouragement that they can do it."*

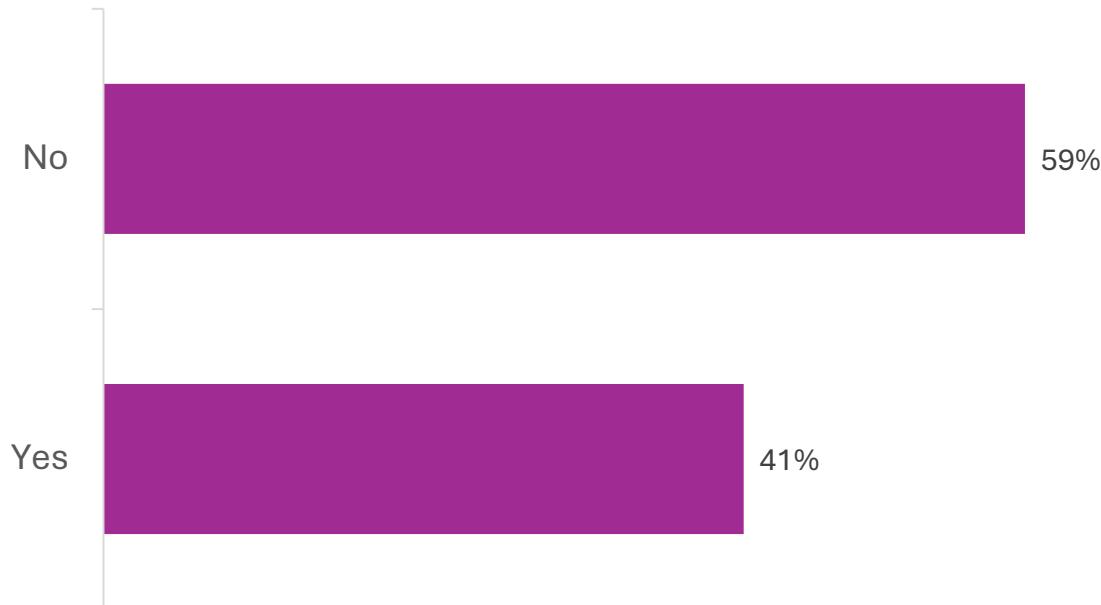
*"Knowledge of skills is usually good, but ability to effectively time manage within a team is a challenge."*

\*not all participants answered every question

# Survey Results: Hospital Transition Programs

## Participated In Any Hospital Transition Program

New Grads (n=41)



# Survey Results: Barriers in Transition to Workplace

## Students (n=49)

Any Barriers as They Transition to The Workplace?	n	%
Yes	15	31%
No	34	69%

*.. I feel I wasn't given the tools in school to recognize certain behaviours or do mental health focused assessments.*

*I feel hesitant to apply into hospitals, since my last placement is long term care.*

## New Grads (n=41)

Met With Any Barriers as You Transition into Work as A New Graduate *	n	%
Yes	17	52%
No	16	48%

*Working with multiple patients (larger patient load) in acute care.*

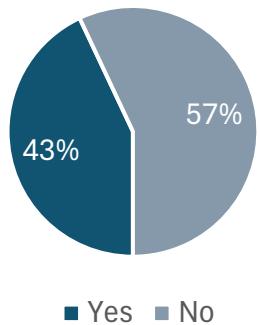
*There are gaps in knowledge about some advanced medical equipment operation in the acute care setting which I didn't encounter during my placements.*

\*not all participants answered every question

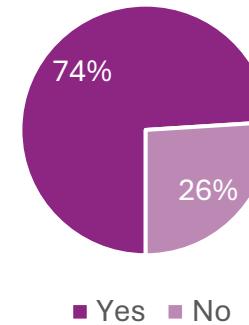
# Survey Results: Clinical Scholars

## Was Supported by or Has Interacted with Clinical Scholars

Students (n=49)

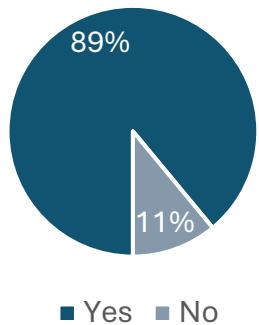


New Grads (n=41)

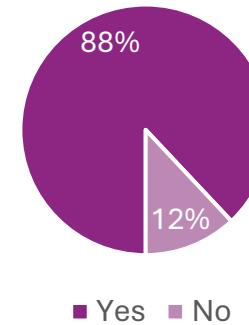


## If Yes, Did They Improve Your Experience in Being Prepared for Your Position \*

Students (n=49)



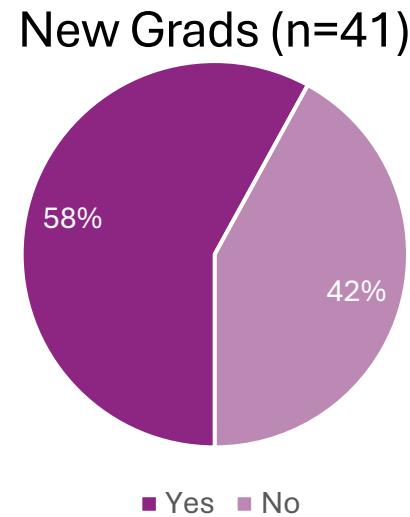
New Grads (n=41)



\*not all participants answered every question

# Survey Results: Clinical Scholars

## Clinical Scholars Provided Support/Closed the Practice Gap Between Academic to Clinical Practice \*



*"No because they offered mostly paper work for me to read but not really showing me how to do something. and most of the times they were busy teaching something to other coworkers who was not new grad and neglect me and my new grad coworkers."*

*"Yes, I strongly believe that the clinical scholars provided invaluable support and helped bridge the gap between academic and clinical practice. Their guidance, mentorship, and expertise were instrumental in helping me translate theoretical knowledge into practical skills."*

\*not all participants answered every question

# Survey Results: Professors, Instructors and Preceptors

## Students (n=49)

Did Professors, Instructors, and Preceptors Provide Support/Close the Practice Gap? *	n	%
Yes	29	74%
No	10	26%

*"Most instructors were supportive when things arised."*

*"PAS are very approachable and helpful."*

*"By providing real life examples, they encountered helped bridge this gap."*

*"I think more could be done. The students without a science background or a PSW background fall through the gaps regarding what's expected in a clinical setting. Professors usually assume we all know the same things."*

\*not all participants answered every question



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# Survey Results: Anything Else Academic Institutions Can Implement

## Students (n=49)

Is There Anything Else Their Academic Institution Can Implement to Make a More Efficient Transition? *	n	%
Yes	17	49%
No	18	51%

*"information on Rex PN, temp licences, exam formats, prep courses...also finding how to get into certain nursing career areas and what is entailed."*

*"Overall, I had great experience yet. All of my professors are extremely nice and explains theory or skills very nice without making it difficult."*

*"... The amount of group work in the course where I had to do nearly the entire project due to the poor work quality from my group members, or risk a poor grade, was exhausting and frustrating..."*

\*not all participants answered every question

## Survey Results: Anything Else You Would Like to Share

### New Grads (n=41)

#### Is There Anything Else You Would Like to Share with Us on Your Experience as a New RPN Graduate?

*"How to Manage stress would be a great addition to classes."*

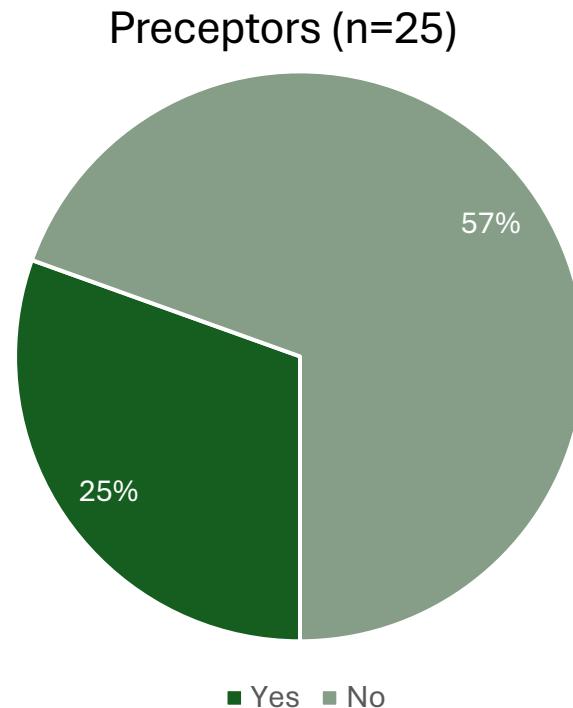
*"Interview prep."*

*"... I want to emphasize the importance of self-care and prioritizing one's own well-being during this transition period. It can be overwhelming to navigate the demands of a new career, and it's essential to take care of oneself physically, emotionally, and mentally."*

*"I would like to thank for all experienced nurses that supported me during my transition. My workplace has been a huge help for me by providing mentorship."*

# Survey Results: Any Personal Knowledge Gaps

**As A Preceptor, Did You Identify Any Personal Gaps in Knowledge/Preparedness to Support a Graduate Nurse \***



*"Teaching students from different cultural backgrounds sometimes presents a new challenge."*

*"It's a gap in maturity and emotional intelligence... If they haven't been an extern, new grad nurses struggle navigating the team dynamics of a healthcare environment."*

\*not all participants answered every question

# Qualitative data

The secondary component to this study was conducting interviews with Students (n=5) and New Graduates (n=5).

The following information speaks to the experiences of students and new graduates, drawing on 1-hour interviews that we transcribed verbatim and line-by-line coded.

Themes from qualitative interviews:

- Peers and Procedures
- Practice
- Placements & Preceptors
- Preparedness and Perceptions

# 1. Peers and Professors

- Students described learning from and supporting one another throughout their education.

- I was succeeding in that one because I had classmates that we were working together. (WeRPN\_S\_08)
- Teamwork, relying on each other. Those like scared empty stares to each other and we're like, we got this, we can do it... Yeah um and again like what I would miss my partner would pick up and then vice versa. (WeRPN\_NG\_1)
- I liked the insights from the instructor that we had. She was really good at explaining either little signs or real world scenarios, that kind of stuff really helped. (WeRPN\_NG\_03)
- They have always asked us like if you have any question always inform us ask us as many as questions you want because in real life you won't get chance but this is the time when so like they have always been helpful they've always like given us like extra education they've always like if they have told us like if you have any issue you can come after classes come talk to us we can get through it. (WeRPN\_S\_04)



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## 2. Practice

### SIMS:

I thought SIMs were like simulation lab was amazing I loved it. I think it's great and like a nice way to have like that safety blanket for like you're experiencing an acute situation. this like helps build my confidence significantly (WeRPN\_S\_03)

I think it's because it's not real. I don't know how to explain that. It did in some ways but I don't like playing pretend, so it was hard for me. It was nice to see other people like and how they would react in certain situations so being in those small little groups was beneficial for sure (WeRPN\_NG\_1)

### Open Access:

I went to open access throughout and we had two people there that were like full-time so they would always help us out with everything that we needed and our understanding. I think it was like IV and then like doing like my cardiac assessment. That one was like a little bit more difficult. But then I finally understood it when I went to open access and got like further help with it (WeRPN\_S\_02)

- Students reflected on their experiences on SIMS, Open Access and Labs and its impact on their learning.

### Labs:

Labs were like the most like main focus that I seen that helped me the most and like going to open access too I went to open access throughout and we had two people there that were like full-time so they would always help us out with everything that we needed and our understanding, and then like concepts, you're like learning everything but then lab, you're actually performing it. I feel like everything like blending into one. It really sets you up for like completing it and understanding it. (WeRPN\_S\_02)



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### 3. Placements & Preceptors

- Students shared their reflections on placements and their positive experiences with Preceptors

My second one, I was just like I feel like it helped me like grow my independence because I felt like I was pretty independent. There was consistent times where I'm like, hey, you told me to come get you, you told me you didn't want me doing this and like also knowing how to advocate for myself and my patient (WeRPN\_S\_03)

I think it's the best so far because you're able to actually practice the skills. You're learning and practicing at the same time and you're doing what you will be doing in the future. This is the time that I've learned the most. It's challenging though because throughout, we've not really had this time of taking care of a full a complete load of patients and so it's also challenging you know you really have so much to do you have to prioritize your work you have to, even though you know that there's somebody that is by you that if there's any challenge you can still run to but it's more challenging. It's exciting and challenging at the same time. (WeRPN\_S\_08)

(WeRPN\_S\_02) having someone who's there to like be by your side and motivate you too, and like not like put you down if you don't like get it the first time or the second time like they're actually there to help you I think that makes a huge difference in like your whole experience about it.

One-on-one with the same person. So you get to know each other you feel, you almost feel like you trust her and she trusts you and you build that relationship. (WeRPN\_S\_04)

Placements increase like the timing I feel like of my last placement would help me significantly because like I feel just like I got robbed of that opportunity to be able to practice vital skills (WeRPN\_S\_03)



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# 4. Preparedness and Perceptions

- Students described their feelings on preparedness and perceptions

I do think that like a slightly longer orientation for a new grad versus a new hire would be nice because I think I got the same orientation I would have if I'd been working for 10 years. And so you kind of feel like at the end of your orientation, wait, wait, wait, I have more questions (WeRPN\_NG\_2)

definitely set the building blocks although there are things that I wish we could have done more of. But I was easily able to work on that once I was consolidating  
(WeRPN\_NG\_3)

- WeRPN\_S\_02) I feel like um all like the skills that we learned even throughout like labs and everything, you're doing that all now and you're getting more experience with like actual people versus like mannequins and like you have someone there to like advise you and help you out throughout the whole experience, so I feel like it really helps.

Like I feel like the first like week or two like you're more nervous. But then as time goes by, you start to like get things more, everything starts to click more (WeRPN\_S\_02)

I think all we hear about is how much people need nurses and oh, it's like such a rewarding experience and don't get me wrong, it is, but nobody also prepares you for the exhausting part of it the like you hear like school like post-secondary school is hard. Okay, this was hard. (WeRPN\_S\_03)



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# Lessons Learned

- Timeliness (limitation in number of students moving from student to new graduate, and challenges with recruitment)
- Starting with a more focused acute care sample in students (samples were utilized in students directing career path to acute and long term care.) Students choices in placement is out of their control, but career trajectory is not always able to match academic placements.
- Participant strategy could have started larger, as it broadened our knowledge collection and speaks better to the transferability to the broader sector that RPN's work
- Gift card honorarium should have started with an increased amount due to the challenges in recruiting.

# Implications for Education & Practice



- Academic institutions need to understand the challenges being met by students, new graduates and preceptors
- The role of the RPN in acute versus LTC (promotion of roles within the RPN profession)

# Future Directions



- The effective role of clinical scholars on new graduates transitioning to practice
- Anti-LTC loss of skill? How is LTC presented to students? Roles/responsibilities
- Research re: students now with f/u in 1 year and 2 year to compare experiences of individuals rather than of different groups

# Thank You!

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# Questions for consideration

- What are you seeing in the field regarding students' readiness to practice?
- What should future research with and for new RPNs and RPN students focus on?



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