Chapter 15

Volunteer Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) on an eLearning Development Project:
The Effect on Timelines, Quality, and Project Management

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Representatives from eight different organizations collaborated to develop a self-paced elearning course to teach preceptor skills to staff nurses in various healthcare organizations. The course employed a constructivist theory of learning and simulated many of the conversations and relationships staff nurses experience when performing preceptor responsibilities. Three of the four subject matter experts were volunteers and never compensated financially for their work on the course. The project manager used an iterative instructional design model and a generic project management methodology. The team considers the project a success because the

course is complete, albeit two years later than scheduled, and generating a small amount of revenue. Additionally, the team progressed through the four stages of team development, reaching the "performing" stage, and the course is part of an effective three-pronged solution to avert a potential nursing shortage in the state.

DEFINITION OF PRECEPTOR

"A preceptor is a practitioner who assumes his/her daily work routines in addition to being a role model, socializer and educator for a student" (Dalhousie University, 2009, 1st para.). Preceptors are typically staff nurses who work one-on-one with preceptees. Preceptees are new staff or nursing students who are in school preparing to be a nurse.

As a role model, a preceptor demonstrates nursing skills and competence, exemplifies problem solving, models ethical and professional behavior, and demonstrates commitment to professional development. As a socializer, a preceptor introduces a preceptee to the culture and value system of the agency, as well as the physical work setting and co-workers within the agency. The preceptor also introduces the preceptee to the goals and objectives of the precepting experience.

As an educator, the preceptor helps preceptees identify their learning needs and plans learning experiences to address those needs. Preceptors also assess and re-assess preceptees' knowledge, skills, and motivation, providing timely and constructive feedback. Finally, as an educator, a preceptor helps transition theory into practice and communicates the progress of the preceptee to either the preceptee's manager or professor of record (Dalhousie University, 2009).

Preceptees learn in clinical settings that demand astute assessment skills and the analysis of critical physiological data that can have life threatening consequences for the patient. The clinical milieu can be an over-stimulated learning environment that if poorly managed, can result in unsafe and deadly outcomes for the patient. One of the key roles of the preceptor is to manage the stimuli in the clinical setting to enhance learning and skill development while insuring patient safety. The preceptor is thus responsible for both the development of the novice nurse and for assuring the safety of each patient.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

There were eight different organizations involved in this project, whose goal was to implement an online, self-paced course to teach preceptor skills to staff nurses. Two of the organizations were involved in the funding. One of the funding organi-

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