

Case Study
**Streamlining the Nurse Practitioner Precepting Experience at Federally
Qualified Health Centers**
Upper Midlands Rural Health Network
Rev. 1/6/2025

Introduction

Key problems and issues

Nurse Practitioner (NP) is one of the fastest growing occupations, projected to grow 45% between 2022-2032, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics¹. One requirement of the NP program is to complete a specific number of clinical hours with a preceptor/provider. An NP's preceptor can be a Nurse Practitioner, Physician Assistant, or Physician. Competition for finding a preceptor is high, especially for NP students who are not affiliated with a large, brick-and-mortar, academic institution.

Thesis statement

As the healthcare field continues to become consolidated through buyouts and mergers, independent Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) are untapped resources for NP students looking for preceptors. The FQHCs are rich learning environments since many of them offer a broad array of services such as obstetrics, pediatrics, and internal medicine. There are a variety of steps that the students, preceptors, and administrators at FQHCs can take to streamline this experience for the benefit of everyone involved.

Background

The primary academic institutions offering NP programs in South Carolina (SC) are: Anderson University, Charleston Southern University, Clemson University, Francis Marion University, Medical University of South Carolina, and University of South Carolina. There are also several large, well-known universities with robust online programs, such as Duke University, Ohio State, and Georgetown. Additionally, there are several online programs offered through traditionally virtual schools such as Capella and Walden University. Therefore, an NP student may face competition for precepting opportunities not just from their known classmates, but from other students participating in virtual programs who live in SC and need to find a preceptorship close to home.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/fastest-growing.htm>

Evaluation of the Case

What is working

FQHCs provide a broad range of care and often include not only Physicians, Nurses, and Nurse Practitioners, but Dental Professionals, Mental Health Counselors, Social Workers, Community Health Workers, and Educators as well. This is a rich learning environment for NP students who are exposed to different disciplines in addition to broader population health issues, such as health disparities and the social determinants of health.

What is not working

According to the South Carolina Health Professions Data Book², the percent increase of Nurse Practitioners from 2019/2020 to 2021/2022 was 16.8. This is the second highest percent change in all 20 healthcare professions actively practicing in South Carolina. The percent increase in NPs is second only to Physician Assistants. As a result, there is an increasing number of NP students competing for a limited number of preceptorships.

Proposed Solution/Changes

The NP student, the Preceptor/Provider, and the FQHC Administration all play key roles in ensuring a smooth and positive experience. Preceptorships benefit everyone involved. There should be a paradigm shift from simply fulfilling a requirement to the broader implications.

1. The FQHC can play a key role as a teaching facility.
2. Readily available preceptorships ensure students receive the necessary training, graduate on time, and enter the workforce prepared.
3. Providers play a key role in educating the next generation. Additionally, the providers can learn the newest and most innovative research from the students.
4. Preceptorships can help Administration identify strong candidates for future employment.

To learn how one FQHC recently enhanced its preceptorship program, watch the session titled “Increasing Preceptorship Opportunities for Nurse Practitioner Students at FQHCs,” available at the SC AHEC Learning Portal <https://www.scahec.net/learn/>.

² <https://www.scahec.net/scohw/reports/139>

Recommendations

To ensure a smooth experience, following are several recommendations for each team member.

For NP students

- Get an early start on lining up your preceptorship. Competition is real!
- Realize that your presence in the clinic might be seen as an interruption to the smooth flow of the operations. Be adaptable, be polite, and if something changes, be sure to communicate it to everyone it impacts.
- See the resource guide for students, found here <https://umrhn.org/program-information> under the “Increasing Preceptorship Opportunities for Nurse Practitioner Students” program.

For Preceptors/Providers

- Participate in SC AHEC’s free online virtual course “Preceptor Orientation & Education” found here <https://www.scahec.net/learn/programs/cpd/2445>
- Talk with the Administrators at your facility about what is needed to make the preceptorship process more feasible for you and your site. There should be a non-clinical staff member in charge of the logistics of securing a student placement.
- Students should attend office meetings about patient care, such as morning huddle.
- Get to know your student. If they are early in their studies, you will be reinforcing the fundamentals such as basic assessments, OLDCARTS, and HIPAA. If they have already had some clinical experience, you can have them develop treatment plans, enter notes into the electronic medical record, and take the lead on basic procedures, such as sutures.
- Lunch and Learns are ways for your students to learn new drugs.
- Professionalism is very important. The student is learning and will pick up preceptor mannerisms. For example, do you greet each patient? Do you introduce yourself? Are you actively listening to each patient? Set the student up for a successful career.
- Explore potential tax credits for your time precepting <https://dor.sc.gov/about/forms>

For FQHC Administrators

- Ensure precepting is part of your workplace culture by including expectations for precepting in job postings and performance reviews.
- Have key staff, not just providers, participate in SC AHEC’s free online virtual course “Preceptor Orientation & Education” found here <https://www.scahec.net/learn/programs/cpd/2445>
- Students should have some type of orientation to your organization by Human Resources. This is a brief orientation on policies and procedures as well as HIPAA.
- Student should know where basic supplies are, and should know each office team member and their roles.

- Ensure that every member of your staff treat the student as they would the provider.
- Understand that time with the students reduces the number of relative value units (RVUs) for the provider, thus impacting the bottom line. For recommendations regarding other forms of potential financial support, please see the feasibility study here <https://umrhn.org/program-information> under the “Increasing Preceptorship Opportunities for Nurse Practitioner Students” program.