



Growing the Future of Surgical Services: A Preceptor Story

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Background and Opportunity

Northeast Georgia Health Systems (NGHS) is a growing organization located in the foothills of the Northeast Georgia mountains. Our mission at NGHS is to “improve the health of our community in all we do.” Though NGHS provides innovative healthcare options to the communities it serves, it is also a place for its community members to work, learn, grow and succeed. At the end of FY 25, NGHS was the employer of 12,335+ employees and served as a clinical rotation and observation site for a multitude of school programs north of Atlanta.

To provide these opportunities for students, improve the onboarding process of new employees, increase retention rates, and provide safe and quality care to our patients, it is essential that we have strong preceptors to welcome, guide, train, and mentor the next generation of health care workers at NGHS.

With organizational growth at NGHS over the past several years, an opportunity was identified to grow our preceptor program. A proposal was made for the surgical and procedural areas to have preceptor training separate from the clinical preceptor class. Our professional development and competency department approved, and we held our first “Procedural/ Surgical Preceptor class” on November 10, 2023.



Clinical Setting and Description of Team

NGHS is a 6-campus healthcare system with over 1,026 inpatient beds and 51 Operating Room (OR) suites. Our largest campus, Gainesville is a Level I Trauma Center with 28 suites. Our sister campuses consist of Braselton with 7 suites, Braselton Surgery Center with 4 suites, Barrow with 3 suites, Lumpkin with 4 suites, and Habersham with 5 suites. In fiscal year 2025, 32,231 surgical cases were completed.

The primary team for this initiative is made up of the OR educators and organization’s clinical competency educator. Supporting team members include the organization’s clinical competency manager and surgical services’ vice president, directors, managers, assistant nurse managers, educators, specialty coordinators, and unit charge nurses.

Assessment

When speaking to staff in the surgical and procedural areas, it was shared that the content of the clinical preceptor course was important, but the examples and conversations often were more from an inpatient perspective vs. a surgical or procedural perspective.

Additionally, classes were not always in a location and at a time that was conducive to the procedural areas’ schedule.

When the organization started to grow different professional development programs that included the completion of the preceptor course and the advanced preceptor course, a greater need for the procedure areas to have their own preceptor class was identified.

Preparation and Planning

With the support of the surgical services leadership team, the OR educators met with the professional development manager and preceptor program coordinator to discuss our proposal. We were granted permission to teach the class as long as the objectives remained aligned with the clinical preceptor classes. These objectives included understanding the preceptor program, identifying key roles and responsibilities of a preceptor, identifying strategies for conflict resolution, effective communication, strategies for providing feedback, reviewing escalation processes, and exploring different learning styles and personality types and how to adapt to each.



As part of my training to teach the preceptor classes, I attended both the preceptor class and advanced preceptor class taught by the preceptor program coordinator. I met with her after each class to explore her expertise on tips and tricks to make the procedural preceptor classes engaging, meaningful and successful.

After I completed my training with the preceptor program coordinator, I reviewed and identified areas that I could alter to make the material more applicable to the procedural and surgical areas.

Implementation

After reviewing the course content, I worked with our education platform administrator to build the courses so that staff could sign up for these classes electronically.

I scheduled the classes at a centralized location to our 6 campuses.

In the beginning, the class schedule alternated between the basic preceptor course and advanced preceptor course every month.

After the scheduled classes were planned and uploaded, I created posters advertising the classes. These posters were shared with the leaders of the procedural and surgical areas so that they could announce and promote the new courses in their departments.

I also drafted an e-mail that I send out before each class as a reminder of the upcoming class and any additional location information.



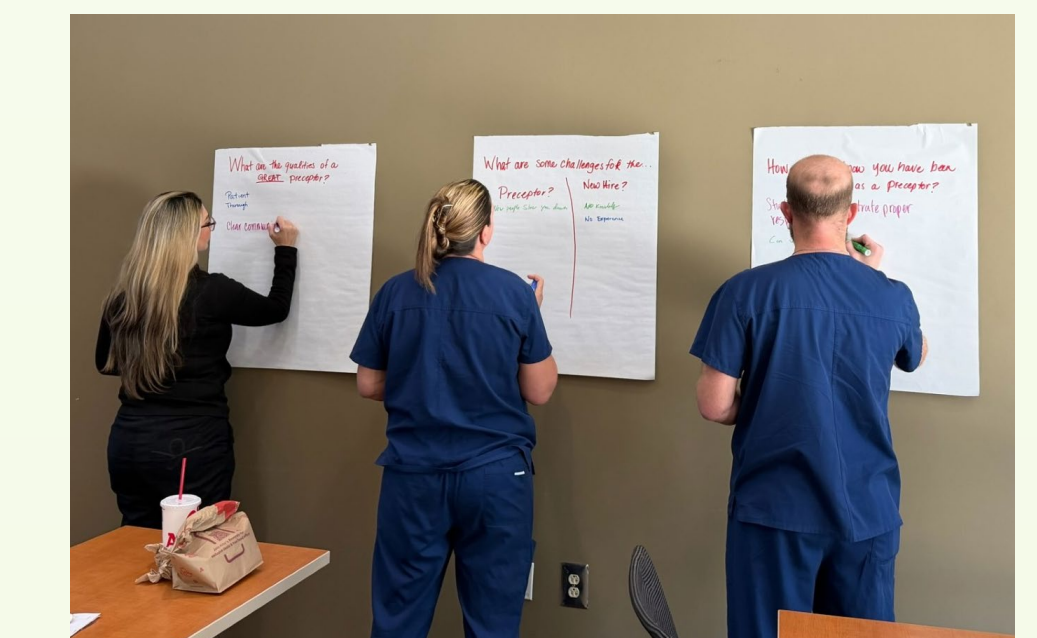
Outcome

From November 2023- February 2026, I have taught 109 employees in the basic preceptor course and 44 employees in the advanced preceptor course.

Based on participation, I now offer the advanced class once per quarter and the basic course the remaining months. This provides an opportunity for more employees to attend the basic preceptor course that is needed to become a preceptor.

Additionally, at the end calendar year 2025, I was granted the opportunity to start awarding continuing education units for these classes.

Most importantly, employees from the procedural and surgical areas have a space to come together, form relationships, and participate in a well-rounded training program to help grow the future of our departments and organization.



Implications for Perioperative Nursing

Having a specialized preceptor training for the procedural and surgical areas, can improve the onboarding of new staff and students. It also fosters an opportunity for relationships to form and allow future collaboration among employees in like areas.