



MedStar Health

# Standardizing OR Nurse Onboarding Using the Tiered Skills Acquisition Model

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## Abstract

The Tiered Skills Acquisition Model (TSAM) was implemented across nine MedStar Health perioperative departments to standardize RN orientation and reduce variability influenced by preceptor style, site differences, and inconsistent competency expectations. TSAM provides a structured, competency-based progression through clearly defined tiers. Survey results from Educators throughout the nine MedStar perioperative departments showed that TSAM supports clearer expectations, enhanced preceptor guidance, and improved orientee confidence.

## Background

Prior to the official Fiscal Year 25 implementation of TSAM, perioperative orientation varied across MedStar's Perioperative departments based on department size, case variety, staffing, and preceptor style. Educators identified that these inconsistencies affected confidence, skill progression, and readiness for independent practice. TSAM was introduced to standardize orientation expectations, strengthen learning, improve retention, and provide a transparent roadmap for both orientee and preceptor.

## Purpose Statement

To design and implement a systemwide tiered orientation using evidence-based practices and designs to support the development of newly hired Perioperative and Perianesthesia nurses (experienced and new to specialty) through implementation of a standardized, structured, team-based orientation model.

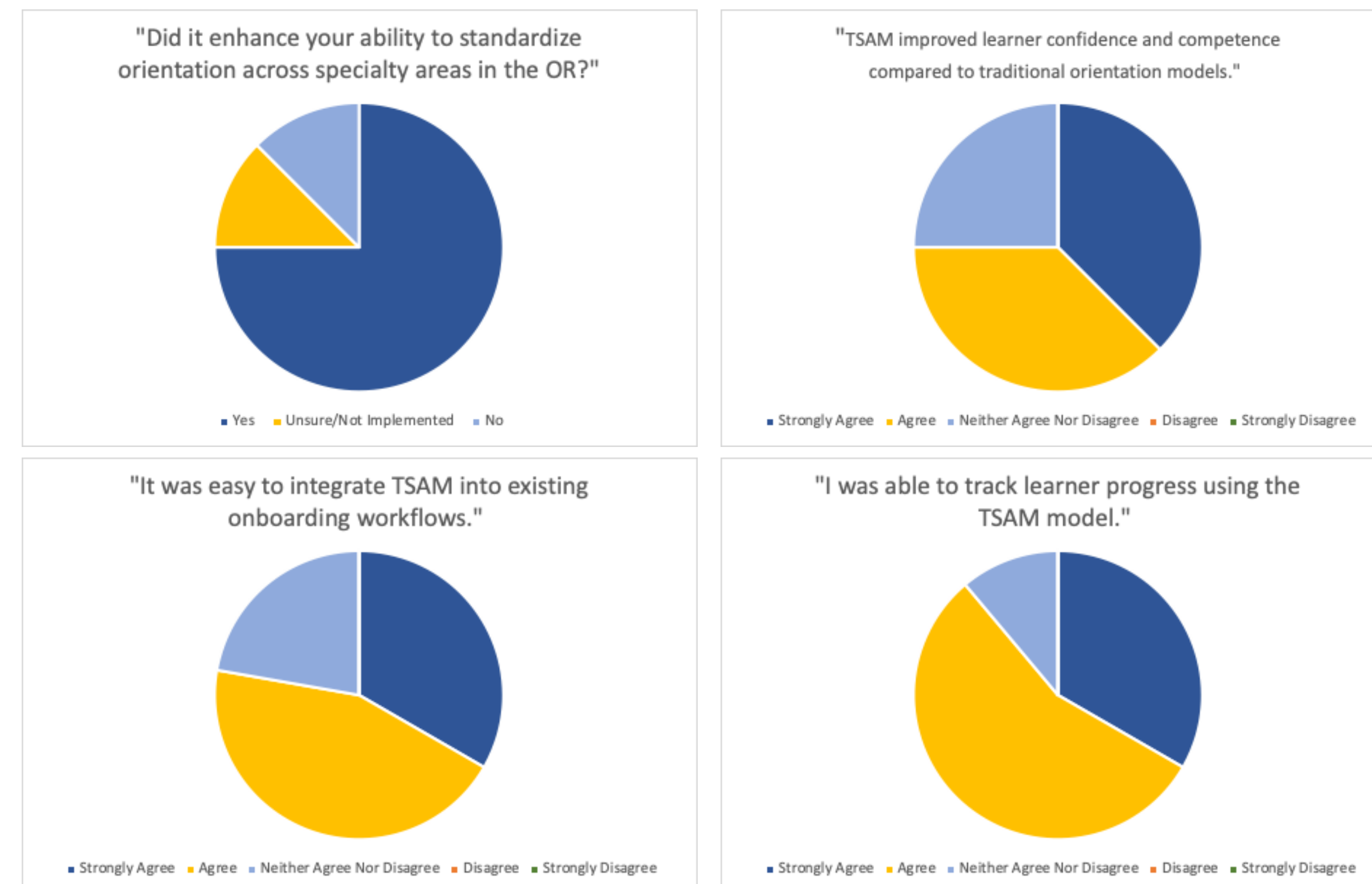
## Methods

The systemwide implementation of TSAM was guided by Benner's Novice to Expert framework, Joswiak's Tiered Skills Acquisition Model, and adult learning principles. A literature review and internal feedback informed the model implementation.

Key implementation steps included:

- Formation of a perioperative workgroup across MedStar Health
- Development of tiered orientation materials
- Leadership engagement and education across all MedStar perioperative departments
- Introduction of this structured model in preceptor training with scenario-based coaching
- Formal and informal checkpoints
- Adoption of the model across OR units and Perianesthesia units, supported by feedback loops and retention monitoring

## Results



Post-implementation survey results from Perioperative NPD Specialists show that TSAM is easy to integrate into onboarding, supports effective tracking of learner progress, and improves learner confidence and competence. These early outcomes demonstrate TSAM's contribution to clearer skill progression, stronger preceptor support, and earlier identification of delayed skill development.

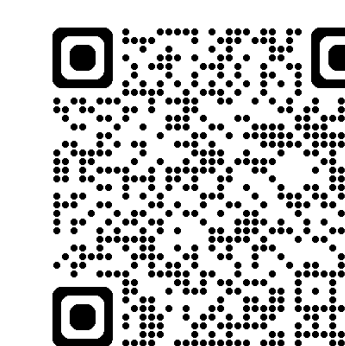
## Discussion

TSAM enhanced orientation consistency and strengthened preceptor and orientee confidence by providing clear expectations and structured pathways. The model supported learner engagement, improved psychological safety, and reduced variability in practice. Challenges included cross-specialty workflow differences and the need for department-wide buy-in, but ongoing education and reinforcement mitigated these barriers. Continued evaluation will refine tier criteria and guide future expansion.

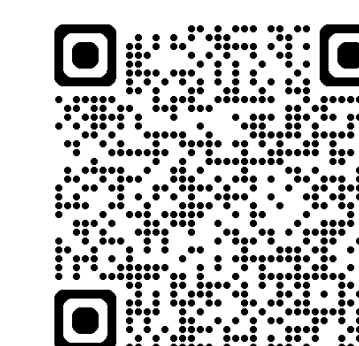
## Conclusion

The Tiered Skills Acquisition Model (TSAM) has successfully standardized perioperative RN orientation across MedStar Health, strengthening confidence, skill progression, and overall retention. Early outcome data demonstrate encouraging trends, reinforcing TSAM as a scalable, evidence-based framework for competency-based development. Among early adopters, retention remained strong within MedStar Health, 86.8% oriented through TSAM remain employed. These findings highlight the value of structured, tiered progression in supporting RN success and organizational stability. Future expansion priorities include adapting TSAM for Scrub Personnel and Patient Care Technicians, enhancing accessibility tools, and further refining tier-based competency checklists to optimize consistency and learner experience.

TSAM Documents



Results



References & Contact

