A Scottish scheme is easing the transition between being a student nurse and qualified practitioner, with online learning, structured study days and mentor support.

A Flying Start for the newly qualified

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Protected learning time
As a result of the findings of Rights, Relationships and Recovery: the National Review of Mental Health Nursing in Scotland (Scottish Executive Health Department, 2006), NHS Ayrshire and Arran set up a rotation scheme to support the programme in the mental health directorate. This allows nurses to rotate through two clinical areas (one community and one inpatient based) during their first year, supporting them to develop competencies. Six facilitated study days are integrated into the programme to allow time to create a Flying Start portfolio of evidence.

Since 2008, all newly qualified adult nurses at NHS Ayrshire and Arran have been entitled to three facilitated supported study days in their first year. A further three supported study days are available at line managers’ discretion.

Supported sessions
The PEF facilitates supported sessions, equally spaced across the year, which provide guidance. These are interspersed with mentor support meetings to monitor the nurses’ progress. The sessions allow for peer-group discussions and enable nurses to raise concerns in a supportive environment. Initially, newly qualified nurses were encouraged to work independently through Flying Start with support from the PEF. However, as a result of nurse feedback, the PEF team developed a structured learning day. This consists of four staggered one-hour sessions where nurses work through the website by themselves, interspersed with group sessions.

The completed Flying Start portfolio of evidence should act as a reflective account of the nurses’ perceptions of their progression. Mentors contribute reports to show how their new colleagues have developed. When mentors and managers are satisfied that nurses have completed all 10 learning units, and demonstrate that they have become more confident and capable within these areas, the completed Flying Start portfolio of evidence is signed by all parties, including the PEF.

Some nurses who have completed the programme have become Flying Start mentors. Their insight into how the programme works has helped ease new nurses’ progression through the learning units. We hope this trend will continue.

Reference