


QUICK-E!  
PRO



# Time Management

*A Guide  
for Nurses*

Debbie Buchwach, BSN, RN-BC

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HCP Pro

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# About the Author

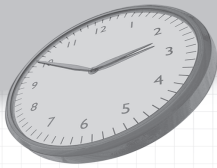
## Debbie Buchwach, BSN, RN-BC

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Debbie Buchwach (pronounced “buck-walk”) is an education consultant in the Center for Learning and Change Management at the Oregon Health & Science University Hospital in Portland. Nursing was not her first career, but it is the one she is most passionate about. She started her nursing career as a medical-surgical nurse. In 2003, she discovered her passion for staff development. She graduated with highest honors from the Oregon Health & Science University in 1998 with a Bachelor of Science in nursing. She is currently completing her Master of Science in nursing, with an emphasis on health systems leadership at Gonzaga University.

Buchwach has developed curricula for preceptor training, new graduate nurse transition support, and change management. Her efforts in these areas have raised job satisfaction, recruitment, and retention levels among staff nurses. She is a member of the National Nursing Staff Development Organization and has presented her work at three of its national conventions. Although she has written articles for *The Staff Educator*, an HCPro, Inc., newsletter, this is her first book. Her professional commitment to patient safety, quality care, and performance improvement is evident throughout this book.

Buchwach lives in Salem, Oregon. Her husband, Brett, also is a registered nurse. She has one son and daughter, Taylor and Lauren; two stepdaughters, Nalani and Lauren; and two stepgrandsons, Dylan and River. She loves the beauty of the Pacific Northwest. For fun, she and Brett spend time on their boat cruising around the San Juan Islands of Washington state, go on family vacations, and are avid football fans.



# Acknowledgments

I enjoyed the challenge of writing this book: the time spent gathering pertinent and meaningful information, reflecting on my personal experiences, and pulling it all together in a useful format. I would not have been able to do this without the excellent education I am receiving at Gonzaga University. I have learned how to conduct a thorough review of the literature, analyze the information, and synthesize it into a meaningful document. At Gonzaga, I learned that health-care organizations are dynamic and complex. More importantly, I learned how to lead from the heart. My role is to listen to the people I work with, hear the questions they are asking, take the feedback they provide, and develop a vision. A leader's success is measured by how well those voices come together to make something meaningful. I appreciate the nurses who have openly shared their real-life experiences (successes and failures) with me so I could understand what they need and how I can help.

A special thanks goes to Mike Briddon of HCPro, Inc., whose positive words of encouragement helped me complete the project. I appreciate your feedback and editing skills. It is always a pleasure to work with you. Thank you, HCPro, for allowing me to share my insights on time management in this format.

Finally, I wish to thank my husband, Brett, and daughter, Lauren, who had to sacrifice time spent with me for hours spent researching and writing. Lauren, thank you for being such a great daughter. I enjoyed watching movies, going shopping, and spending time with you when I could fit in those much needed breaks. Brett, I appreciate your insights, feedback, and contributions to the book. I admire you as a nurse, as a friend, and as my husband.





# Dedication

To my husband Brett, who taught me how to love, laugh, and enjoy life again.



## INTRODUCTION

# Welcome to Better Time Management

“Time management requires a shift from being busy to getting things done . . . from process to outcome.” —Patricia Kelly-Heidenthal, *Nursing Leadership and Management*

Nurses often report they don’t have enough time to get everything done. Although it isn’t possible to add more hours to your day, you can use your time more effectively. This book is for nurses who want to work smarter, not harder.

You will discover tips and strategies to help you realize better patient outcomes while managing your time more efficiently. No matter where you are in your career, you will find useful tips and strategies that can be implemented right away.



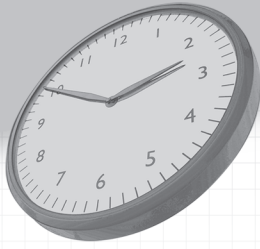
**Quick Highlight:** Be on the lookout for “quick highlights” that will drive home some of the most crucial points in the book.

We’ll take a closer look at:

- Proven strategies that improve efficiency and organization
- Tools to assess how your time is being used and strategies to improve time management
- How the patient’s perception (experience) affects time management
- How work flows affect a unit’s efficiency and effectiveness

Whether you are a new graduate nurse, a nurse with many years of practice, or are serving in a leadership capacity, time management skills are a necessity. This unique resource ties time management, work-life balance, and job satisfaction to patient safety, quality outcomes, and improved patient satisfaction.

Let's get started by reviewing the link between time management and various stages of the nursing career.



## CHAPTER 1

# Managing Time Throughout Your Career

### Learning Objectives

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After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Discuss time management challenges faced by new graduates
- Examine time management struggles typical of experienced nurses

### Challenges for new graduate nurses

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What was expected in nursing school does not match the real-world demands of nursing practice. “The nursing literature reports that the inability to handle the intense working environment, advanced medical technology, and high patient acuity results in new graduate nurse turnover rates of 35% to 60% within the first year of employment” (Halfer and Graf 2006). As new graduates, you may often feel overwhelmed with the demands of your new role and newly acquired responsibilities.



**Quick Highlight:** It is critical that you develop effective time and stress management strategies as soon as you begin to make the transition to your new practice.

## **Reality shock and time management**

One common concern shared by new graduates is the mismatch between what was expected of a student versus what is expected of a registered nurse. In a landmark study of new graduate nurses, Kramer (1974) coined the term for this realization as “reality shock.” Reconciling role expectations with realities of patient care takes time. In fact, Kramer’s study showed that it remains a significant challenge for new graduate nurses during their first 18 months of practice. Time management plays out during the four distinct phases associated with reality shock.

The honeymoon phase is a time of excitement and anticipation. The end of school is in sight, you have passed boards, and you are ready to assume your first position as a nurse. There is an emphasis on learning routines and checking off clinical skills. In most cases, you will have the support of a preceptor, a clinical educator, and perhaps other new graduates. Unfortunately, the honeymoon phase is short.



**Quick Highlight:** A study of new graduate nurses during the first three weeks of transition to practice showed that organization skills were among their top five concerns (Halfer and Graf 2006).

The next phase of reality shock is shock and rejection. In the first three to six months as a new graduate nurse, it is not uncommon to find yourself feeling overwhelmed, anxious, and fatigued. There are good days and bad days. You may often wonder if you are ever going to get it. Orientation is over, and you no longer have a preceptor as a safety net. At times, you may feel disillusioned if you begin to sense that the work environment is not all that you expected it to be. It is critical that you are offered ongoing support. You need to know that you are not alone; all nurses have experienced these same feelings at one point during their career. Research indicates that it will take at least 12 months

before a new graduate nurse will begin to feel comfortable and confident (Casey, et al. 2004). Poor time management and organization skills further complicate a nurse's successful transition to practice. New graduates who are struggling need resources to help them get through this sometimes difficult phase.

Recovery, the third phase of reality shock, is a time when you, as the new graduate, begin to return to an equilibrium state. You begin to tolerate the stressors associated with the new work environment. Your confidence increases. You begin to focus on the positive things that happened on the shift rather than the negative. It is an exciting time. Because you have time to slow down, you can begin to reflect on what you have learned and identify where you need to improve. It is the ideal time to explore new strategies to enhance organization and time management skills.

The last phase of reality shock is resolution. In this phase, you are able to take on the challenges of practice. Although you still need help (we all do), you have come a long way from that first shift on your own. Due to the nursing shortage, new graduates are sometimes asked to assume a leadership role (such as charge nurse) soon after orientation is complete. You might consider this to be a milestone in your transition, but there are high levels of anxiety associated with assuming this role (Deppoliti 2008). The various chapters of this book can serve as useful resources for thinking about time management from various perspectives and relating it to patient safety, quality outcomes, and patient satisfaction.



**Quick Highlight:** "Stressors in rank order were lack of experience, interactions with physicians, lack of organizational skills, and new situations" (Halfer and Graf 2006).

## Struggles of experienced nurses

As a nurse, you have an internal commitment to meeting patients' and families' needs, as well as the needs of the organization and the profession. There has been a growing movement across the United States to improve patient safety, implement quality-care initiatives, and enhance customer satisfaction. Compliance with complex documentation systems, new regulatory requirements, and organizational initiatives often trickle down to the bedside nurse.



**Quick Highlight:** It is a challenge for even the most expert nurse to integrate all of the changes into the daily work flow.

The nurses who once felt they had time management under control can find themselves struggling to keep up. Pressure and frustration build. Nurses begin to experience role conflict (Espeland 2006).

Role conflict occurs when you feel you are being pulled in too many directions. Each initiative (safety, quality, satisfaction) competes for your time and attention.



**Quick Highlight:** The sense that one no longer has control over one's environment contributes to burnout (Espeland 2006).

At this juncture, there are three options: Do nothing, leave, or take control. When you choose not to do anything, you might experience stress, job dissatisfaction, and eventually burnout. Leaving the profession relieves the stress initially, but you may feel like you have failed yourself, the patients, and the profession. Although it isn't the easiest solution, the most satisfying and meaningful one is to find order within the chaos. Nurses are resilient. With time and attention, we can find ways to address the ever-changing world of healthcare.

## A note to nursing leaders

Time management is a critical skill for all nurses. Without it, staff members find themselves experiencing stress and fatigue on a routine basis. This can have a significant negative effect on the individual and the work team and could potentially compromise patient safety. Additionally, nurses need to find a way to balance their work life with their home life. Nurses look to you to lead the way.

Poor time management contributes to the perception that there is not enough time in the shift to get everything done that needs to be done. Some nurses end up leaving the profession due to the physical and emotional stress that takes its toll over time (Sumner and Townsend-Rocchiccioli 2003). Adding to the pressure are the ever-changing organizational demands. You have seen nurses struggle to manage the changes in work flow. Your support and guidance is critical to their success. You can make a difference if you provide meaningful support to meet the needs of nurses wherever they are in their career.



**Quick Highlight:** “Nurses frequently feel overworked and overwhelmed by competing demands on their time . . . Setting realistic goals and prioritizing work helps to prevent burnout” (Espeland 2006).



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