

MENNONITE COLLEGE OF NURSING
AT ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY
Graduate Program - Family Nurse Practitioner Sequence
Initial Orientation to Practicum

You will be expected to gain skills in dealing with clients and families in the ambulatory setting and community. For those of you who have had no professional experience in the community setting, it may take you longer to get your feet on the ground than others who have had such experience. All of you have talked with clients, gotten subjective data from them, done physical assessments, and conferred with others about plans of care. You will continue to do that with those clients you see in the ambulatory setting.

Client contact begins by selecting, together with the NP or MD, those clients in the schedule who have less complex health care needs, perhaps someone who is otherwise healthy, but who now has a URI or ear infection. You will begin by getting history and exam data from clients. You may know in some clients what the problem is after some repetitions (e.g., viral URI), but you may feel hesitant to say so. This is normal.

With time, most students are comfortable with their physical exam skills and the instruments. That is not to say you are expert in performing them all; but you don't have to think so hard to perform the exam. Now you can begin to concentrate on other things, like clinical judgments and care planning. I will expect to see you taking some risks in saying what your assessment is. You don't have to be right each time! Also, and very importantly, I expect that you will consistently be doing (and documenting) relevant patient education. You also can have control in the practicum by letting people know what you are ready for and can handle. If you are not ready for an experience, say so. But you can't play it safe all the time, either. The student role is one in which you can risk in a safe environment. You are putting in time and money in this program to learn. Take advantage of your student clinical practicums!

Physicians are trained to diagnose and treat illness; traditionally, nurses diagnose and treat human responses regarding health. As a result, you have a wider focus for data collection and assisting clients to integrate health-related behaviors into their daily life, whether raising their level of health, decreasing health risks, or adjusting to illness states. Now you will also be participating in the diagnosis and treatment of illness.

The physicians and nurse practitioners are involved in the practicum to 1) provide access to clients in ambulatory settings, 2) validate physical findings, and 3) collaboratively plan care with you. They have no formal responsibility to teach you content although many of them like to teach. You can ask for rationale, particularly if it is not clear to you — physician and nurse practitioner preceptors expect it, and this behavior is not threatening to them. (They have been socialized in their educational programs to expect students to ask questions, to challenge, and expect rationale for the disposition of the client encounter.) The nurse practitioners you will encounter in the program will also be very helpful as role models and preceptors.

You will meet as a small group some weeks for discussion and to obtain guidance for your clinical experiences and progress in learning. These clinical conferences can be used for discussion of specific client situations and interventions, any problems or concerns you have in the practicum experience, and your progress. It is your primary source of access this semester to the faculty member teaching the family nurse practitioner program. Make good use of this time to integrate information across courses, work on your own career goals and research interests, and your active involvement in the learning process.

You may find it helpful to introduce yourself to clients as an RN who is a graduate student. Most lay persons have some idea about students in graduate programs, and will be able to differentiate you from a basic nursing student. Sign your name with "Student FNP" in records.

Last, but not least, it is normal to be anxious in starting a new experience. I would wonder if you were not anxious. So, please jump in and remember first and foremost that I am here for support, to share getting answers to questions, and to provide overall guidance for your learning experience this semester. Faculty will not be with you in the practicum, so you will need to be sure to keep us informed about what is going on for you in the practicum setting. Mostly, have fun and enjoy this new stretch of your talents!