8 Tips for New Grads in the ICU - Show Notes

Below are 8 tips from three certified critical care (CCRN) nurses!

#1 Come in with an open and actively engaged mind
- Expect to be overwhelmed for awhile (at least 6 months)
- Fight the “I want to be perfect” mentality; while it’s admirable, it’s not possible – setting yourself for more stress and disappointment with that expectation
- Nursing is a practice – you’re never going to be at a point where you don’t make mistakes or be perfect. There is an art to this. The skills in nursing school aren’t the only ones you’ll need.

#2 Be aware of typical ICU nurse characteristics
- Assertive, direct, business-like attitudes, detailed-oriented, anticipating things ahead of time, know protocols inside and out, intense, autonomous (very familiar with protocols, able to enact orders/protocols independently and then discuss with MD).
- You are still bringing something to the table, it’s just different than what the others who bring to the table who are already there.

#3 Show initiative
- You’ll have to be assertive yourself - go home to learn and understand more
- Invest time into making yourself better in the off time
- Round with MDs, seeking out learning opportunities
- Introduce yourself to others

#4 - Know yourself and be your own advocate
- Know your learning style and communicate this to your preceptor
- Know your limits / what you don’t know so you can fill in the gaps
  - Please don’t be the new grad know-it-all
  - Find the balance between not knowing anything and being so obvious about that people question your ability to be a safe care provider, and being the know it all who continually acts like they do not need to be educated
- Find a mentor!
# 5 - Own your orientation

- Orientation is truly an extension of nursing school without formal grading
- Ask for help when you need it - sometimes your preceptor cannot always pick up on times when things aren’t clicking
- Advocate for yourself!
- Work through the process of orientation; it’s a marathon and not a sprint

# 6 - Keep an organized routine throughout your shift

- Have a systematic routine way of assessments, your day, meds, etc. otherwise you will miss somethings
  - This helps get through the shift and not miss things.
- Stop and get organized first before starting your shift so you start on a good note.

# 7 - Learn your alarms and use them to your advantage

- Have a love/hate relationship with alarms.
- If there is always one going off, you’ll never know when it’s real...turn yours off if it’s non-actionable or adjust thresholds per policy.
- Use them to remind you so you don’t forget.
- If you change a pump, add volume, silence an alarm, or whatever for another nurse – let them know!
  - Do you hear what I hear? Combating alarm fatigue - American Nurse Today
  - Alarm Fatigue: A Patient Safety Concern - American Association of Critical Care Nurses CEU (free for members, $10 for non-members)
  - Alarm fatigue: a top patient safety hazard - NCBI

# 8 - You need downtime

- Becoming a critical care nurse straight out of school tough and exhausting, take care of yourself
- Again, advocate for yourself
- Take time off for yourself, make time for yourself - no one will do this for you

Resources for newbies to critical care
NRSNG also has quite a few great resources for nursing students and new nurses. There are various courses, or the entire academy. The specific courses that would be valuable to the new ICU RN in particular include:

- The MedMaster Course
- The Lab Value Course
- Cardiac Essentials
- The EKG Interpretation Course