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Top tips for a successful transition from student to newly qualified nurse

After years of study, sacrifice, burning the candle to get assignments in on time, completing practice hours and getting competencies signed off, you've finally made it.

The dream that motivated you all these years – to make a difference to nursing, patients and colleagues – is now a reality, and you are on the threshold of stepping into your career as a qualified nurse.

So how does it feel? Is it how you thought it was going to be, or is the transition from student to newly qualified nurse much harder than you anticipated?

If you're newly qualified, what has been your experience so far? Or if you will be qualifying soon, how are you preparing for this next big move?

Transitions in any context can be difficult as we make the journey from one status or identity to the next, and becoming a registered nurse is no different. An increasing amount of research suggests this can be a stressful and traumatic process, with new staff nurses feeling ill prepared or inadequate, like they've been thrown in at the deep end.

I recently had occasion to reflect on my own transition to being a registered nurse back in 1984, and what I would have liked to have known back then – a kind of letter to my younger self.

So as you face the same transition, and embark on a career full of opportunity and learning, here are a few tips to help you through.

- Never lose your vision or initial motivation. When the going gets tough – and it will – remember your dream and hold on.
- See the person behind every patient, every time. You have the powerful gift of 'being-with' your patients, which can have a profound effect on them.
- Never compromise on standards, even if this means you have to challenge people, systems, or policies. Be prepared to be the grit in the oyster.
- Embrace every experience and situation as a learning opportunity. Reflect on it – whether it went well or not – as there is always something you can learn.
- Respect and value those around you, never forget your roots, and let your journey and all its twists and turns remind you of the importance of relationships. Cultivate and embrace them, even the relationships you find hard.
- Don't be frightened about going into tough situations, physical or relational, as these are the places we grow most. Learn how to feel comfortable about going into uncomfortable situations.
- Surround yourself with support from friends, family and colleagues, who can all be your mentors in the big sense of the word. Make sure you get a proper preceptorship programme.
- Never be frightened to ask for help or admit you don't know something. It is much braver and authentic to acknowledge you don't know something than to try and bluff your way through.
- Commit to an ethos of life-long learning, it will be an investment that won't let you down.
- Look after yourself: keep healthy, eat well, sleep well, and exercise. Create time for yourself.

This may be a challenging time, but it will get better. You can also take comfort from the fact that countless others have successfully made this transition before, and you will too. You will soon look back from the other side and know that you have made it.

Jan Draper is professor of nursing at the Open University