

## The Journey from Student to Teacher

By Lilly Pulko, Staff Nurse  
Children's at Egleston



My career at Children's started through volunteering. I was a "Baby Buddy," spending time with patients in the NICU when their parents weren't available. The babies stole my heart, as did the NICU staff, and before long, I had enrolled in nursing school. I became a nurse extern in the Children's NICU during my junior year of school.

As an extern, nursing preceptors taught me the basics of time management, teamwork, nursing assessment as well as NICU-specific skills. And once I officially became a nurse at Children's a few years later, my preceptors were my salvation. Having people available to me whose sole job was to teach, help and be a resource made all the difference to me as a young nurse. They helped me transition from student to professional nurse—teaching me advanced skills, how to effectively communicate with other healthcare team members, and how to set appropriate goals for myself in my first year. They really helped me ease into my new role and gave me the confidence I needed to perform at my best.

My preceptors were there to guide me shift to shift, but I wanted more guidance. Through the Children's mentor program, I was assigned a mentor according

to my personality type. I wasn't entirely sure what to expect, but I began meeting with my mentor, Natalie, once a month. We discussed predetermined topics as well as any areas where I wanted more guidance.

The knowledge she shared with me was invaluable, and the support she provided really helped. One day, I went to Natalie, because I was having a very difficult time coping with the loss of one of my patients. She was there to help me deal with my emotions and handle the professional interactions with the parents and other staff. I believe that was the day I stopped calling Natalie my mentor and started calling her my friend.

As I develop my skills and continue to learn more advanced competencies on our unit, it helps to know who I can turn to for support. I am fortunate that all of these wonderful people have made me a better nurse and a better person. Children's has provided me with so many opportunities to grow professionally and personally, and someday I hope to be a preceptor or mentor to others. I can't think of a better way to show my gratitude for all of the gifts I've received.

What inspires you? E-mail [Internal.Communications@choa.org](mailto:Internal.Communications@choa.org).