

From Novice to NICU-Ready: Cultivating Confidence Through Collaborative Support

Jacqueline Fair, MSN, RNC-NIC & Andrea Mottershead, MSN, RNC-NIC, C-ELBW
Virtua Voorhees Hospital



INTRODUCTION

Background

Supporting new graduate nurses is critical to patient safety, staff retention, and overall unit performance, especially in high-acuity environments like the NICU. At Virtua Voorhees NICU, a noticeable increase in novice RNs, combined with the pressures of rapid deployment, rising patient acuity, and a demanding clinical environment, led to higher risk of burnout and turnover. These challenges directly threatened the organization's goals of maintaining a skilled, stable workforce and ensuring high-quality, consistent neonatal care. Implementing the Collaborative Support Model (CSM) aimed to address these risks by improving the orientation experience, promoting engagement, and strengthening the transition to independent practice.

Purpose

Project Aim: Improve orientation for new graduate and NICU-inexperienced nurses at Virtua Voorhees NICU through the Collaborative Support Model (CSM)

Goals:

- Enhance clinical confidence
- Strengthen communication
- Increase staff engagement
- Reduce turnover

Rationale:

- Traditional orientation lacked structured, ongoing support
- National trends show high attrition, especially in critical care settings

Need:

- Innovative, supportive onboarding strategies
- Promote nurse retention and ensure safe, high-quality patient care

Framework:

Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA)

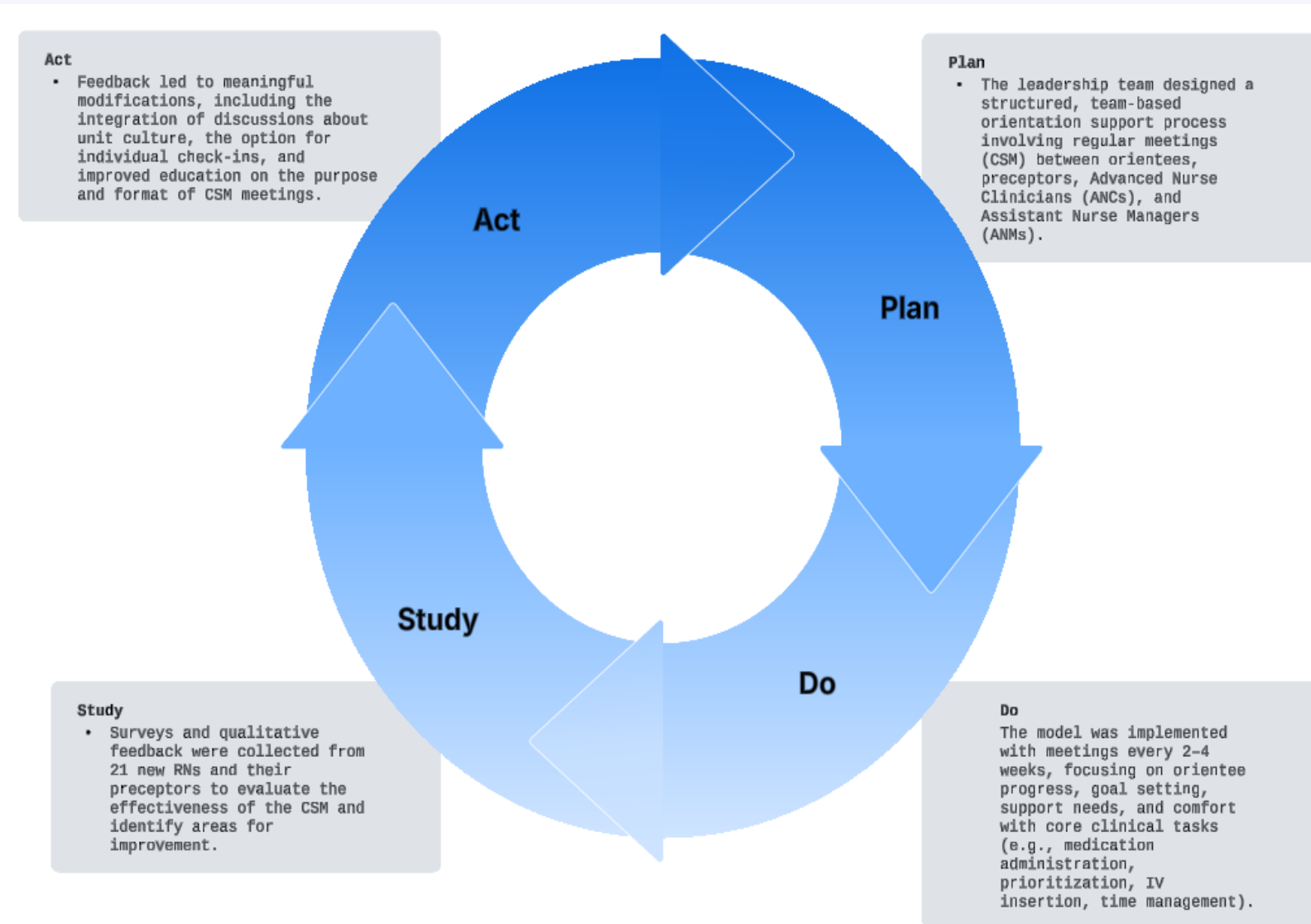
- The CSM fosters collaboration through regular meetings between orientees, preceptors, Advanced Nurse Clinicians (ANCs), and Assistant Nurse Managers (ANMs).

METHODS

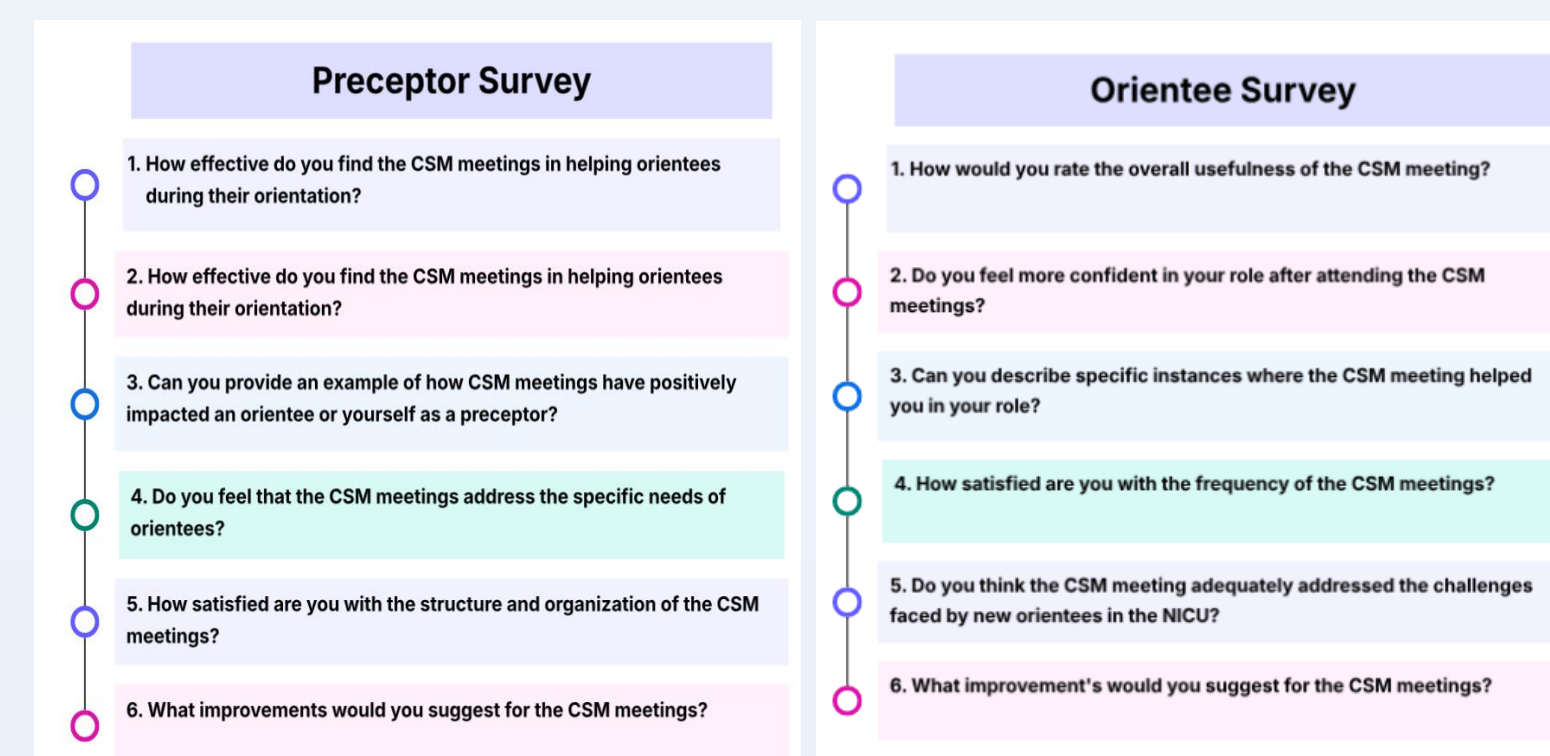
Setting and Participants:

- Setting: Level III Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Virtua Voorhees Hospital.
- Participants: New graduate RNs and RNs with no prior NICU experience in conjunction with preceptors, Advanced Nurse Clinicians (ANCs), Assistant Nurse Managers (ANMs).
- Timeline: March 2024 to current state.

Intervention/Process:



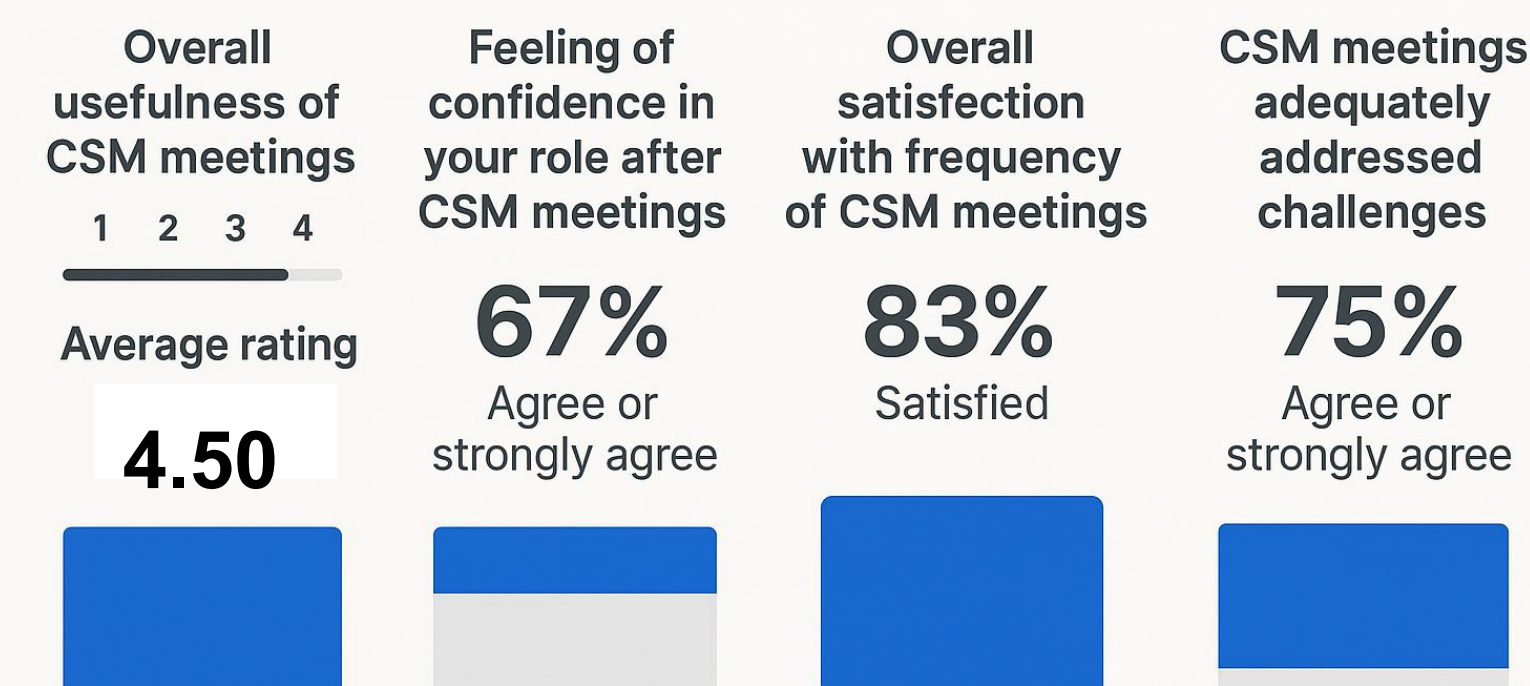
Data Collection and Analysis:



RESULTS

Key Findings:

- Participants reported increased support, improved communication, and stronger team engagement.
- Orientees rated CSM meetings 4.63/5 for usefulness, with 76% stating it boosted their confidence during orientation and transition to independent practice.
- 71% of preceptors found CSM very effective in supporting orientee progress.
- Notably, no negative responses were reported, highlighting the model's positive impact.



Actionable Data:

In response to the open forum question for improvements:

- Offering independent follow-up meetings surrounding the CSM meetings
- Incorporating questions related to unit culture and environment
- Ensuring that meetings consistently involve the orientees' primary preceptor.
- All improvements were recently implemented as changes to the CSM meeting.

CONCLUSIONS

Interpretation:

The orientation process has been strengthened by these changes, and ongoing surveys will continue to inform future improvements.

Relevance:

The Virtua Voorhees NICU remains committed to using the PDSA cycle to iteratively refine orientation practices to improve engagement, communication, safety, nurse satisfaction, and ultimately decrease turnover rate. This approach ensures that the orientation model remains responsive to the evolving needs of the nursing workforce.

Limitations and Future Directions:

- Small sample size: feedback was collected from only 21 new RN's and their preceptors, which limits generalizability.
- Single-site implementation: conducted only at Virtua Voorhees NICU
- Short evaluation period: data reflects early outcomes; long-term impact on retention and performance remains unknown.
- Variability in CSM delivery: differences in preceptor involvement and meeting constituency may have influenced participant experiences.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contributors:

Virtua Voorhees NICU Leadership
Virtua Voorhees NICU Preceptors

Contact Information:

Jacqueline Fair: jfair1@virtua.org
Andrea Mottershead: amottershead@virtua.org