

# Engaging Nurse Residents Through Poetry

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Oncology nurse residents write legacy letters to future cohorts in the 11th month as a reflection on their transition year, focusing on lessons learned and advice gleaned. This article explores poetry as an alternative to legacy letters. The limerick writing assignment was well received. Legacy messages provided a deeper understanding of residents' experiences, subsequently guiding curriculum improvement. Changes included beginning a dialogue in the first month on the importance of self-care, handling emotions, and incorporating evidence-based, cognitive behavioral skills-building. First-year nurse resident turnover rates in year 1 decreased from 14% (2019) to 5% (2022).

## AT A GLANCE

- After the first year of practice, RNs can provide valuable advice to the next generation.
- Using poetry as a modality for reflection creates an alternative form of expression.
- Poetry is a fun, creative, and cost-effective way to engage participants.

## KEYWORDS

nurse residents; oncology; poetry; reflection

## DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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To support nurses within their first year of practice, the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida, instituted an oncology nurse residency program. The program supports RN graduates in their first year of patient care practice when they are transitioning to clinical nurse roles in acute or ambulatory settings. Early feedback from the program included a desire for less passive learning, such as a lecture-based curriculum. The organization also recognized that not all individuals learn information in the same way.

Throughout the program, nurse residents participate in various modalities to enhance learning and increase retention. These modalities include gamification, simulation, case studies, and multiple reflective outlets. These active teaching strategies allow the residents to learn through various teaching styles. Active learning strategies such as simulation elicit emotions from the learner that a facilitator can respond to, ensuring that the learner is best prepared for practice (Madsgaard et al., 2022). Gamification has been proven to be an effective tool for increasing participation and engagement (Li et al., 2023). Activities such as escape rooms challenge the learners to work collaboratively and use critical thinking to provide the safest care with available resources (Seymour et al., 2023). See Table 1 for a list of topics and learning strategies used in the oncology nurse residency program.

The oncology nurse residency program values reflection throughout the curriculum, using group discussion and reflective journaling. The program incorporates the practice of writing legacy letters in which nurse residents in their 11th month write a letter about lessons learned, advice, and additional information they would like to pass on to future cohorts (Brown et al., 2023). The letters are compiled in a document available on the intranet, and new nurse residents in the program can benefit from learning from their peers through these letters. A qualitative thematic analysis of these legacy letters was conducted in the Advara Institutional Review Board–approved study in 2020. Thirty letters were randomly selected for analysis and revealed the following four major themes: knowledge and skills acquisition, emotions of the profession, the patient/family–nurse connection, and self-care (Brown et al., 2023). The investigative team independently reviewed the letters and then reviewed them together. All letters were read, reread, coded, and refined into the identified themes (Brown et al., 2023).

To get a fresh perspective, the nurse residency program incorporated writing limerick poems to include the same themes as a legacy letter. A *limerick* is often described as a light or humorous five-line verse in which lines 1, 2, and 5 and lines 3 and 4 create a rhyme scheme of a-a-b-b-a. Similarly, lines 1, 2, and 5 have seven to nine syllables, and lines 3 and 4 have five to seven syllables (Baldwin, 2020; Merriam-Webster, n.d.). An instructor presented a Microsoft