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**The Perpetual Novice - A Cultural Exploration of Vascular Access Cannulation  
Among Nurses in a Chronic Hemodialysis Unit**

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The native arteriovenous fistula (AVF) is the vascular access of choice for hemodialysis yet, AVF use in the United States and Canada is less than optimal. There are a number of contributing factors to low AVF use such as patient-related factors however, nursing perceptions and interventions specific to cannulation may have an influence. To date, little is known about nurses' attitudes and experiences with AVF cannulation. The purpose of this study was to describe the culture and everyday practices of vascular access cannulation of the AVF from the perspective of the hemodialysis registered nurse. An ethnographic research design was employed. Ten hemodialysis nurses in an urban acute care hospital unit were interviewed using a semi-structured interview tool. A number of themes were generated from the interviews. One overarching theme of "perpetual novice" was evident. Other common themes that emerged from the interviews were a) limited fistula numbers, b) the fistula as a "hard sell" to patients, c) the skill of cannulation, and d) the assembly line. As a result of a number of factors, nurses were unable to acquire the skills necessary to become an expert cannulator and fewer opportunities to practice cannulation has resulted in wide variation in skill level between nurses. Nurses identified a number of educational strategies and the need for improved documentation systems as means to increasing successful cannulation. Results of this study will be helpful in directing future educational, supportive, and practice interventions for hemodialysis nurses.

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