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The Impact of Continuous and Ongoing Professional Development on the Nursing Process of Taking Care of Neurological Patients

Wpływ kształcenia ustawicznego i doskonalenia zawodowego pielęgniarek na proces opieki nad pacjentami neurologicznymi

Lenka Kopačević¹, Vesna Božan Mihelčić², Sonja Antić¹, Vida Demarin¹

¹Clinical Department of Neurology,
Referral Center for Neurovascular Disorders of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Croatia,
Referral Center for Headache of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Croatia,
Sestre Milosrdnice University Hospital Center, Croatia
²Zagreb-Centar Primary Health Center, Zagreb, Croatia

Abstract

Introduction. Nurses distinguish continuous professional development intended for career improvement and personal development from continuous professional development intended for improvement of skills and knowledge. Too many requests are put in front of an individual unacceptably stretching it onto the life outside work. Nurses and students have various expectations from their education.

Aim. The aim of the study was to recognize the motivation and expectations of nurses undertaking further nursing education.

Material and Methods. A three-phase study was conducted in 2007, 2009 and 2010 and included 622 nurses, 132 head nurses and 106 nursing undergraduate students at the University of Applied Health Studies in Zagreb, respectively. Anonymous questionnaire was used in the study.

Results. Factors that motivate nurses to study are to improve knowledge, patient care and professional relations. Factors connected to personal development include boost of confidence and embracing of other values. Motivation for additional education is also connected to the change of work, practice improvement, self-confidence improvement, nursing career plans, and necessary intellectual stimulation. The reasons for which nurses decide to undertake further education are also desire for maintenance of clinical competence, but also enjoyment in studying itself.

Conclusions. A permanently educated nurse will be able to assess the needs of patients of health care on time and consequently organize the provision of health care by using all human and technical resources. (JNNN 2014;3(1):10–14)

Key Words: continuous professional development, nursing practice, education, motivation

Streszczenie

Wprowadzenie. Pielęgniarki dostrzegają różnicę między kształceniem ustawicznym dającym szansę rozwoju osobistego i lepszej kariery w zawodzie a ciągłym doskonaleniem zawodowym, którego celem jest pogłębianie wiedzy i podnoszenie umiejętności zawodowych. Pielęgniarkom stawiane są zbyt wysokie wymagania, które rozciągają się poza sferę zawodową. Pielęgniarki i studenci pielęgniarstwa mają różne oczekiwania związane z procesem kształcenia. **Cel.** Głównym celem badań było poznanie i określenie motywacji oraz oczekiwań osób kontynuujących naukę w zawodzie pielęgniarstwa.

Materiał i metody. Przeprowadzono trzyfazowe badania w latach 2007, 2009 i 2010, które objęły kolejno: 622 pielęgniarki, 132 siostry przełożone oraz 106 studentów pielęgniarstwa na University of Applied Health Studies w Zagrzebiu. Badania przeprowadzono za pomocą anonimowego kwestionariusza ankiety.

Wyniki. Czynnikiem, które motywują pielęgniarki do studiowania są: chęć pogłębiania wiedzy, poprawa opieki nad pacjentem oraz udoskonalenie relacji zawodowych. Czynniki związane z rozwojem osobistym obejmują wzmocnienie pewności siebie. Motywacją do dalszej edukacji jest chęć zmiany pracy, udoskonalenie umiejętności zawodowych,

umocnienie pewności siebie, plany rozwinięcia kariery oraz stymulacja intelektualna. Innymi czynnikami, dla których pielęgniarki decydują się na dalszą naukę są potrzeba utrzymania kompetencji klinicznych oraz chęć uczenia się dla przyjemności.

Wnioski. Dobrze wykształcona i ciągle kształcąca się pielęgniarka będzie w stanie na czas ocenić potrzeby pacjenta, a co za tym idzie, będzie potrafiła wykorzystać wszelkie zasoby ludzkie i techniczne, by jakość jej opieki była na najwyższym poziomie. (PNN 2014;3(1):10–14)

Słowa kluczowe: kształcenie ustawiczne, doskonalenie zawodowe, praktyka pielęgniarska, edukacja, motywacja

Introduction

Studies conducted over the past decade in countries implementing planned continuous professional development have established that nurses differentiate between continuous professional development intended for career advancement as well as personal development and continuous professional development model for improving knowledge and skills. One of the conclusions is that too many demands have been placed upon the individual thus unacceptably extending professional life to the life outside of work [1]. These findings also confirm that students have different expectations from education. Their search involved both personal and professional factors. The factors that motivate nurses to study are to upgrade their knowledge, improve patient care, and enhance professional relationships. Factors associated with personal development include increasing trust and opening of other possibilities. Motivation for further education is also associated with job change, improving practices, improving self-esteem, plan for nursing careers, and the necessary intellectual stimulation. The reasons why nurses choose further education is also desire to maintain clinical competence and satisfaction of studying itself. The employers who expect from nurses to opt for such a type of education or stimulate it are another common reason [2].

Raising self-esteem is assessed as a very important reason. It is as summed that nurses may have lost confidence in their traditionally acquired skills. In one study, ninety-nine percent of respondents estimated that the reason offered for advancement to a higher position was very important [2]. Yet, other studies confirm that nurses assess the increase of business opportunities that are available within the nursing as a major opportunity for improvement. In a vast majority of studies, one of the factors that motivate nurses to study was improvement of patient care. Some participants felt they would benefit from continuous education in terms of their own self-esteem, believing that they had missed something in their education, while others wanted to continue studying in order to prevent its stagnation. Furthermore, some of these participants identified gaps in their prior education [3]. From the professional standpoint, individuals feel under pressure from their work environment to embark on further education. There is an assumption that those

who participate in further education do so in order to raise their income. Employees who continue their education on average have higher incomes than those who do not attend school [4].

The aim of the study was to recognize the motivation and expectations of nurses undertaking further nursing education.

Material and Methods

In 2007, a survey was conducted at all sites and activities of nurses in neurology in Croatia on a sample of 622 respondents. Data were collected using an anonymous questionnaire designed for the purpose of this study.

A similar survey was conducted in the late 2009. With regard to the adjustment of Croatian legislation during negotiations to join the European Union, the survey was expanded to include additional questions. The survey included 132 head nurses at all sites and nursing activities as well as rehabilitation points in neurology and neurological department at the national level.

In order to get some answers why nurses continue their education, in 2010 there search was conducted in a sample of 106 nursing undergraduate students at the University of Applied Health Studies in Zagreb. An anonymous questionnaire was used in the study.

Results

In 2007, only 12% of nurses have been involved in the education process in the field of nursing. Analysis of data showed that a small number of respondents opted for education after high school, only 8% of the total sample, even though 60% expressed desire for further education; 65% of respondents considered education necessary for their future work; 31% of respondents thought that education was not one of the conditions for their future work in the profession; and 4% of the respondents had no defined answer to the question. The analysis did not determine the reasons and the biggest obstacle to continued training of neurological nurses who wished but were not able to enroll in the required studies. It may be assumed that the reasons

were the lack of time, working shifts, the lack of will and motivation, undefined professional status, finances, employers' support in terms of finance, and ensuring free time education.

In 2009, 87% of respondents considered continuous professional development through permanent professional improvement necessary in everyday work. Although the majority (45%) were not inclined to enroll in graduate nursing clinical studies, 31% of them claimed they would do it all again; 94% of respondents believed that *status quo* should have been recognized as the place of nurses, and only 6% did not. Most respondents (43%) did not know whether the study would live up to their expectations, but 94% agreed that residency for neurological nurse should not be within the internist residency. Specifically, a tendency is to take place within the same residency of internal activity. The fact is that until now residency program for nurses with secondary school education in the activities of neurology has not yet been defined. Not even legal provisions bring any instructions on how to conduct residency for neurological nurses. At the same time, the second year of graduate studies in clinical nursing at neurology department provides courses in all areas of healthcare of neurological patients, including neurorehabilitation, neuropediatrics, research in the field of neurology, ecology, diagnosis, etc.

In 2010, 30% of respondents stated acquisition of new knowledge and also advancement on the hierarchical scale as the motive for enrolment in the nursing study. Other motives were higher payment, employer, and diploma on the last place (Fig. 1).

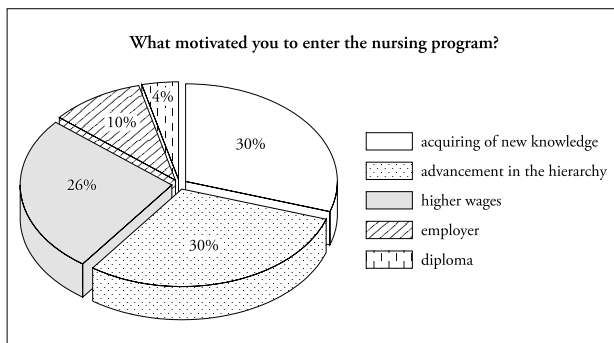


Fig. 1. Motivation for learning

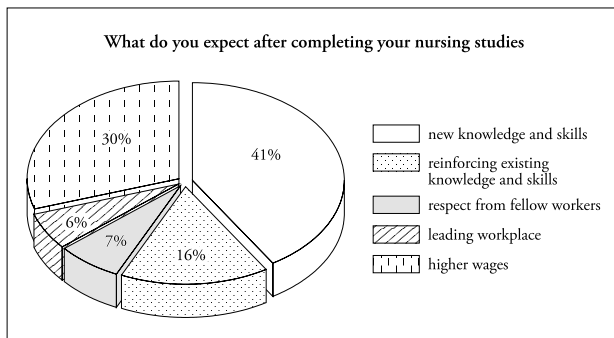


Fig. 2. General expectation from nursing studies

The other motives were higher wages, the employer and awards on the last place. Upon completion of the nursing study, 39% of respondents expected to acquire new knowledge and skills, even 30% higher payment, 11% reinforcement of the already acquired knowledge and skills, but also a leading working place, and only 9% respect from coworkers (Fig. 2).

The expectations were mostly met in 41% of first year students and only partially in 40% of the respondents (Fig. 3).

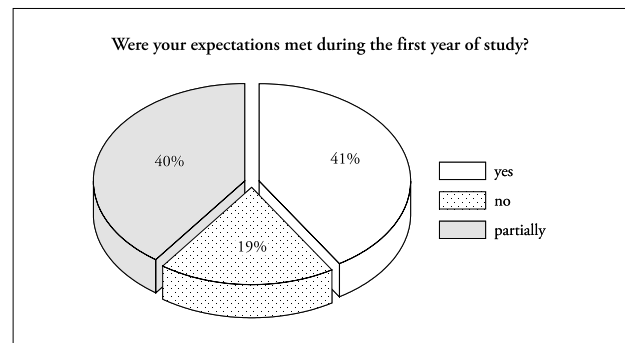


Fig. 3. Expectations from first year of study

Students mostly commented on the organization of lectures and training (51%), followed by literature availability (32%), and involvement of teachers (11%), at least their active participation in class work (Fig. 4).

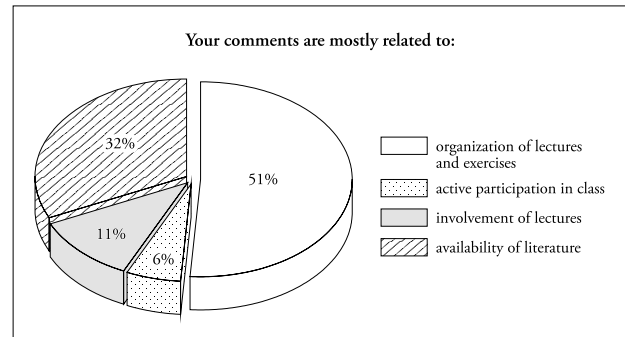


Fig. 4. Comments on organization of study

The majority of respondents (46%) had problems with coordination of work schedule, 30% partially, and 24% of students had no such problems (Fig. 5).

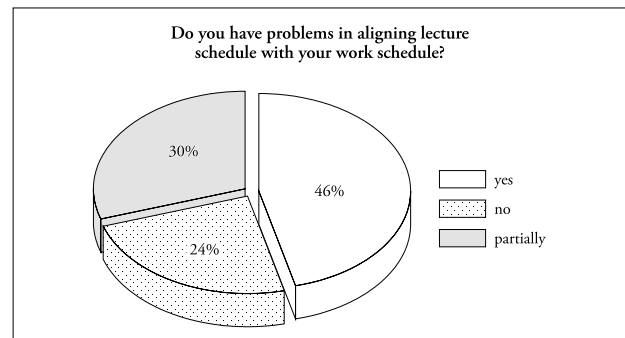


Fig. 5. Problems with aligning lecture and work schedule

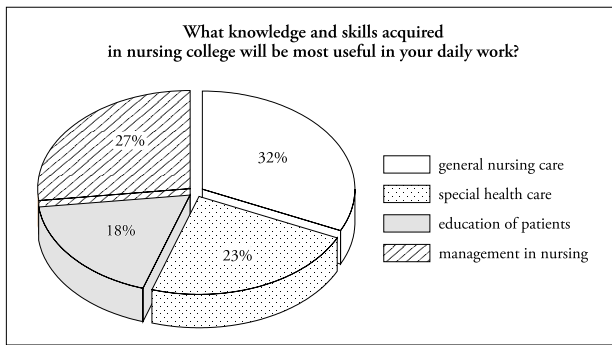


Fig. 6. Application accomplishments in daily work after study

Upon completion of the study, 43% of respondents believed that new knowledge and skills could be applied in practicing general health care, 31% believed it to be applicable in special health care, 25% of respondents would apply the same knowledge and skills in the education of patients, and only 1% in nursing management (Fig. 6).

Discussion

Results of the studies conducted in the countries that provide continuous professional development can be interpreted in several ways. Although the most important reason for continuing education has been advancement on the job, according to the responses, the highest percentage of subjects continue their education in order to improve their clinical assessment and expand their clinical role. A smaller percentage of subjects refer to the claim to increase business opportunities within the nursing/health care. Improvement of practical skills and plans for career in nursing are equally important. This may mean that there is a broad interest in moving horizontally in various aspects of nursing rather than in continuing professional vertical advancement. In wider debate, the possibility of further education that will result in professional and personal improvement should certainly be involved in decisions on their further education.

The results of the study can also be interpreted in a way that even the nurses that are not very dedicated to the type of work or are currently not satisfied with their employers should take part in the continuous professional development either to escape or as part of a strategy to find a future job that they find more appropriate.

Studies conducted at all sites in Croatia where neurology medical nurses work have confirmed strong interest of the nurses in further education after completing secondary education, but also a small percentage of their enrolment in undergraduate professional studies. Although the majority of respondents thought their further education to be important in their daily work, a large number of respondents did not know whether the stated course would meet their expectations. They

believe that we should recognize the *status quo* according to their current working places. Most subjects were not inclined to enroll in graduate studies of clinical nursing, but almost all of them agreed that it should be implemented within the same residency internist activities. The desire to acquire new knowledge and advancement possibilities are the main motivators for enrolment. What they expect from professional study courses is acquisition of new knowledge and skills, and higher salaries after graduation. The expectations are met in a greater percentage of students after the first year of study. The main objections to the study refer to the organization of lectures and exercises, and the least of them object to active participation. A large number of students had problems in combining the study schedule with their working schedule. The result that the majority of respondents will use the adopted knowledge in general care, while only a small part will use it for patient education calls for further discussion.

The fact is that there are a large number of nurses who after graduation have not changed their position very often or for many years. Until the passing of the Nursing Act (OG121/03), they did not receive any kind of training even at their work site. The quality of their professional judgment, usually important for the quality of their work, is questionable in such cases. Inevitably, it seems that their knowledge cannot follow the job requirements, thus making them reluctant to any change. Patients, on the other hand, experience nurses in a positive way, but expect from them nothing important to their health, while a doctor in their opinion deserves respect. Sometimes this results in insecure and scared patient, since doctor of ten does not have time to talk to him, communication between doctors and nurses does not take place at the level of equal members of the team, the doctor does not have confidence in the nurses and underestimates them, the nurse then takes defensive stand feeling insecure with low self-esteem, finally resulting in poor and unprofessional communication with the patient.

There is much discussion on what constitutes support for continuing professional development and what can be a key factor that leads to an individual's decision to take part in it [5]. Education is expensive and time-consuming in terms of financial, personal and professional commitment, and demands careful consideration of the potential participants as well as the entity that bears the cost of schooling. The cost of replacing the staff during their absence due to education affects the manpower and skill combination. Two additional barriers have been identified as a challenge [6]. One is convincing the head nurses that the staff progress is of vital importance for the nursing service, and the other is explaining the importance of a systematic approach to identifying training needs and training itself. The necessity of

nursing, the number of nurses and the cost of services rendered is an omnipresent discussion. This discussion also extends to the fact that expecting the results without financial investment is not realistic, especially if striving for excellence. The more nurses are satisfied with their careers and the longer their work period together with the knowledge and skills they acquire throughout their education, the higher is their expertise and the acquired experiences. Therefore, such an investment will not only help retain nurses in their field of work, but will also contribute to the quality of the workforce.

Conclusions

A permanently educated nurse will be able to assess the needs of patients of health care on time and consequently organize the provision of health care by using all human and technical resources.

Implications for Nursing Practice

Good organization of the implementation of health care in hospitals, which is always based on well-educated and competent nurses, can significantly affect the overall success of treatment that has the expert and financial effects. Since nurses in a hospital care carry out more than 80% of all the procedures in 24 hours, their impact on the total care is proportional to their share in the health care. It should be noted that nurses' expertise is most important but so are other elements: a sufficient number of nurses, good distribution, based on changing needs, good equipment and accessories for the implementation of health care and space conditions.

Continuous, systematic standardized collection, analysis and interpretation of data related to plans for permanent training and comparison with health statistics can be useful in the educational system when creating programs that will result in competent and competitive workers. Determination of priorities, ongoing program evaluation and research encouragement can be of utmost importance when support individuals and groups in career management and professional development.

In order to provide good health care services provided to individuals or groups, policy makers and vocational guiders should take into account the transparency and easy access when planning the education. They should

focus on key issues related to the current needs of the health system, take into account the flexibility and innovation in presentation skills, the ability of research and collect data in various fields of nurses' activities, access to verified and integrated information from areas of interest to nursing activities and the creation of a structured database.

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Corresponding Author:

Lenka Kopačević
Clinical Department of Neurology,
Sestre Milosrdnice University Hospital Center,
Vinogradska c. 29, HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia
e-mail: lkopacevic@gmail.com

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Author Contributions: Lenka Kopačević^{A-H}, Vesna Božan Mihelčić^{A-H}, Sonja Antić^{A-H}, Vida Demarin^{A-H}

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