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Registered nurses experiences supervising international nursing students in the clinical setting

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ABSTRACT

Background: Clinical experience exposes nursing students to the realities of professional practice and opportunities to integrate theory with practice. Increasing multiculturalism in Australia means that approximately 27% of students studying in Australian universities originate from overseas. Yet there is a paucity of literature examining the experiences of Registered Nurses charged with their clinical supervision.

Aim: To examine the experiences of Registered Nurses who supervise undergraduate international nursing students in the clinical setting.

Design and methods: A qualitative holistic case study approach was employed to achieve the study aims. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were undertaken with six Registered Nurses.

Findings: Thematic analysis elicited four main themes representative of Registered Nurses' experiences supervising international students: (1) communication, (2) the role of supervision of international nursing students, (3) language and culture, and (4) supervisors' perceptions of responsibility.

Conclusions: Participants provided valuable insight into the role of supervision of international students in the clinical environment. Suggestions for improved communication between healthcare and educational organisations and increased support for supervising Registered Nurses were made. Specifically, training regarding different linguistic and cultural issues was suggested.

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Problem/issue

There is an increasing demand for Registered Nurses to supervise international nursing students on clinical placement—yet there is little research offering guidance.

What is already known

Clinical placement is vital to develop clinically competent Registered Nurses. Students require a supportive clinical environment and high quality supervision to develop professional competence.

What this paper adds

Evidence that Registered Nurses find supervision of international students more challenging than non-international students. Navigating the international cohort's unique language and cultural idiosyncrasies requires additional time and culturally appropriate communication strategies. Registered Nurses require education and support for these strategies to promote student learning and maintain patient safety.

1. Introduction

Clinical experience is considered an essential component of undergraduate nursing education globally (Luhanga, Billay, Grundy, Myrick, & Yonge, 2010; Nelwati, McKenna, & Plummer, 2013). Clinical experience exposes nursing students to the realities of professional practice and facilitates integration of theoretical concepts with practical nursing skills in a safe, supported environment (Skår, 2010). The nursing profession relies heavily on Registered Nurses (RN) to supervise students undertaking clinical experiences (McCarthy & Murphy, 2010; Newton, Pront, & Giles, 2016; Omansky, 2010). However, simply allocating an RN to super-

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wise each student does not necessarily mean quality learning will take place. Seminal work by Benner (1984) identified that students require a highly supportive environment where they feel safe to develop as learners. Furthermore, the link between high quality clinical supervision and students' professional competence has been well established (Courtney-Pratt, FitzGerald, Ford, Marsden, & Marlow, 2011; Omansky, 2010).

Clinical supervision and education of undergraduate nursing students is a key responsibility of all RNs (ANMAC, 2012). However, evidence suggests they feel unprepared, ill-equipped and unsupported to carry out this role (Abu-Arab & Parry, 2015; Clare, Edwards, Brown, & White, 2003; Newton et al., 2016; Omansky, 2010), often because they do not understand the requirements of the role (Newton et al., 2016; Omansky, 2010). Additionally, interchangeable terminology describing student supervision can be confusing (McCarthy & Murphy, 2010; Nelwati et al., 2013; Omansky, 2010). The terms mentorship, supervision, preceptorship and facilitation are all frequently used to refer to the relationship which facilitates personal, intellectual and professional growth of a novice through a supportive, interactive relationship with an expert (Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2003; McCarthy & Murphy, 2010; Morales-Mann & Smith Higuchi, 1995; Omansky, 2010). While we acknowledge differing interpretations and terminologies, for the purpose of this paper the term 'supervisor' refers to RNs in positions of clinical teaching, mentorship and supervision of nursing students.

Clinical supervision becomes even more complex when students are not able to use their first language during their clinical placement experience. This is particularly pertinent in Australia with its growing number of international nursing students (Crawford & Candlin, 2013; Jeong et al., 2011; San Miguel & Rogan, 2009). Recent statistics indicate that approximately 27% of students in Australian universities originate from non-English speaking backgrounds (Crawford & Candlin, 2013). Although individual universities in Australia specify minimum English language requirements for admission into nursing degrees (usually >6.0 overall IELTS score), communication problems still exist.

International nursing students provide a diversity of culture, nursing practice, language and learning. However, they can also present supervisors with inherent transitional challenges including cultural differences, teaching and learning complexities, language barriers, loneliness, social isolation and discrimination (Jeong et al., 2011; Newton et al., 2016; San Miguel & Rogan, 2009; Shakya & Horsfall, 2000). Consequently, supervision of international students in the clinical setting presents unique challenges for RN supervisors to navigate. (Crawford & Candlin, 2013; Newton et al., 2016).

Language and cultural difficulties during clinical placements have been explored from the perspective of international nursing students (Crawford & Candlin, 2013). However, there is a dearth of literature exploring these issues from the perspective of the supervisor. A recent review of the limited studies available (Newton et al., 2016) suggested language and culture present significant challenges to supervisors. In particular, supervisors' expectations of international students often conflicted with those students' cultural learning styles and social behaviours. Furthermore, this review identified that RN preparation was key to the supervisory role. However, preparation in the form of education, support from health care facilities, universities and other staff was reportedly low or absent.

This current study aimed to contribute to the sparse literature related to this phenomenon, to explore areas for improvement and offer recommendations to better prepare supervisors for the role supervising international nursing students. Our findings have the potential to support supervisors, enhance the clinical learn-

ing experience for international nursing students and ultimately influence nursing care provision.

2. Research aim and objectives

The aim of this study was to examine the experiences of RNs who supervise undergraduate international nursing students in the clinical setting. Two objectives were developed to meet case study criteria:

- Identify RNs' perceptions of the supervisory role to international nursing students
- Discover whether RNs believe they receive adequate education and preparation prior to supervising international nursing students

3. Method

3.1. Design

Case study is used where 'the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2009). In this study the phenomena (the RN) is intricately connected with their environment (the clinical setting), therefore a division between the two cannot be articulated. A multiple, holistic case study approach was considered the most appropriate research design to address the complex interpersonal interactions between supervisors and international nursing students (Yin, 2009). It also accounted for the intricate connections between supervisors and their clinical environment. Furthermore, case study enabled examination of the phenomena (RN as supervisors) within its situational context (the clinical environment), where the two cannot be clearly defined (Yin, 2009).

3.2. Participant selection and characteristics

Purposive sampling was initially undertaken using recruitment flyers distributed by the principal researcher (LN) to all wards at one major South Australian metropolitan hospital. One participant was recruited through this method. Snowball sampling and recruitment through professional contacts resulted in an additional five participants.

Recruited participants had completed both their high school and university education in Australia and had experience supervising International nursing students in the clinical setting. Interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim by the principal researcher who also explained the study aims and objectives and obtained informed consent (both written and verbal at the time of interview).

3.3. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was provided by the relevant Ethics Committee. Detailed information sheets were provided by the principal researcher to all participants to facilitate informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained by allocating participant pseudonyms and de-identifying organisations and sub-specialities.

3.4. Data collection

Data collected via in-depth audio-recorded interviews and transcribed in full by the principal author enabled immersion in the data and facilitated analysis. The interview guide contained 13 base-line (closed) demographic data questions and 12 semi-structured, open-ended questions. The questions explored participants' defini-

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