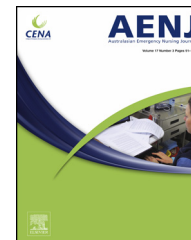




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RESEARCH PAPER

Confidence and impact on clinical decision-making and behaviour in the emergency department



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KEYWORDS

Confidence;
Self-efficacy;
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Summary

Background: Clinical competency is underpinned by the self-confidence of nurses to act. Confidence may be critical to the understanding of how practice choices are made and not made by nurses in extended practice roles. The aim of this study was to explore how emergency nurses perceived (i) self-confidence in undertaking an extended practice role; and (ii) the factors associated with confidence within clinical practice.

Methods: A multicentred qualitative exploratory study. Fifty two participants were included in the study. Across three sites 36 (28 females, 8 males) face to face interviews and 16 non-participant observations (13 females, 3 males) were conducted.

Results: The study generated new knowledge about self-confidence, self-efficacy and the role that contextual factors have in regulating behaviour. It shows that self-confidence is an important resource that sustains a nurse's ability to problem solve and to critically think in order to determine how best to act.

Conclusions: The development of self-confidence is important if we are to promote effective clinical decision-making. Education programmes need to identify strategies that can promote and support the development of self-confidence and resilience.

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What is known

- Confidence is critical to clinical decision making and understanding how practice choices are made or not made by clinicians.
- Understanding confidence may assist with better comprehension of how nurses experience and undertake new clinical roles.
- There is little research to date exploring the utility of self-confidence within the emergency department, especially in relation to extended practice roles.

What this paper adds?

- Individual behaviour and social context are important factors in regulating clinical decision making and practice.
- Confidence is an important resource that sustains a clinician's ability to problem solve and to determine how best to act.
- The development of confidence is important if we are to promote and support the development of self-confidence and resilience in clinical practice.

Introduction

The New South Wales Clinical Initiative Nurse (CIN) role was introduced as an extended practice role that enabled expert emergency nurses to initiate diagnostic tests, treat and manage a range of patient conditions.^{1–3} The extended nurse role aimed to meet the needs of waiting patients, achieve timely and appropriate patient care with other emergency department team members and provide coordinated care.¹ Extended practice policy guidelines enabled nurses to work within a broader scope of practice.⁴

The CIN scope of practice is between that of a RN and the regulated Australian Nurse Practitioner (NP) role.⁵ Aspects of the CIN role have similarities with roles, such as the Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) in the USA, Emergency Nurse Practitioner (ENP) in Britain or the Australian Clinical Nurse Consultant (CNC).⁶ The CIN role also shares similarities to other international roles such as the rapid assessment nurse, fast track nurse, stat nurse and advanced practice nurse roles seen in other Australian states, New Zealand and Canada.^{6,7}

Clinical decision-making by expert nurses is a complex process set within dynamic contexts and comprises a diverse knowledge base and experience.^{8,9} Within practice a distinction is typically made between novice and expert. The expert is generally understood to have superior decision-making skills that draw on a deep reservoir of knowledge and experience.⁸ However, within clinical settings clinicians have varying degrees of transition between more and less experience and expertise.⁸

A number of personal capabilities are present in decision-making that enable nurses to make effective clinical decisions. Personal capabilities are defined by the notion of self-efficacy or a person's ability to organise and execute

the action required for designated types of performances.¹⁰ Self-efficacy is an individual's confidence in their ability to successfully accomplish a given task or activity.¹¹ Bandura^{10,11} has stated that self-efficacy is more than a belief in ability level; it orchestrates the motivation necessary to conduct behaviour. Thus self-efficacy assists to determine what activities nurses engage in and the degree of effort they have for pursuing the task and their resilience in the face of adversity. An individual's *confidence* level reflects personal self-efficacy and sustains the individual's perception of the ability to successfully accomplish a particular task or activity.¹² Self-confidence also influences a nurse's ability to undertake tasks appropriately, effectively and brings critical thinking into clinical practice.

To date there is little research that has explored a nurse's self-confidence when undertaking extended practice roles. Confidence may be critical to the understanding of how practice choices are made or not-made in everyday practice. Understanding confidence may also assist with better comprehension of how nurses experience and undertake new clinical roles. To date there has been minimal research exploring the utility of self-confidence within complex and changing environments, such as emergency departments (ED).

Aim

The aim of this study was to explore the emergency nurses perceived (i) confidence in undertaking extended practice roles; and (ii) the factors associated with confidence, self-efficacy and role behaviour within clinical practice.

Methods

This was a multicentred qualitative exploratory study.

Study sites and sample

The study was undertaken across three EDs and included a metropolitan university tertiary referral hospital, a regional referral hospital and a regional hospital. A purposeful sample of nurses that undertake the CIN role was sought. The inclusion criteria included CIN+ who had two years emergency experience and had worked in the role for more than one year.

Interviews

An 18-item semi-structured interview tool was developed and comprised open-ended questions that assisted to direct the nurse's thoughts towards role activities and behaviour. Five items measured confidence (self-efficacy). Confidence was rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (uncertain) to 10 (extremely confident). The self-efficacy measure identified if nurses felt capable of performing in the role (the sum of affirmative responses is the magnitude of the self-confidence). The sum of confidence ratings was the strength of the self-efficacy. The interviews were audio taped to minimise distraction and encouraged the free flow of thought.

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