



Original Article

What do nursing students contribute to clinical practice? The perceptions of working nurses[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study purpose was to elicit factors that caused satisfaction and dissatisfaction for staff registered nurses (RNs) who participated in two types of nurse student interactions: clinical rotation role-model and student preceptorship.

Background: The limited availability of practice sites for clinical experiences places essential importance on the need to understand RNs' perceptions of students' effect on their practice.

Methods: This cross sectional descriptive study surveyed RNs who worked at six acute care hospitals in two multi-hospital not-for-profit community healthcare systems in southeastern United States, using the Nursing Students' Contributions to Clinical Agencies (NSCCA) survey via SurveyMonkey®.

Results: Registered nurses had positive perceptions of students' contributions in clinical rotations and student preceptorships, specifically, enhancement of the nurses' professional development was a satisfier for participants. Nurses who were student preceptors and nurses with less than ten years of experience had the most positive perceptions. Nurses in the peri-natal setting had the least positive perceptions of students' contributions.

Conclusions: Findings from the NSCCA survey can reveal satisfiers and dis-satisfiers for RNs participating in nurse–student interactions, which academic and clinical practice nurse leaders can use to enhance the RNs' experiences. Results were used to create a series RN student preceptor training classes, which incorporated educational content that highlighted satisfiers and remediated dis-satisfiers.

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1. Introduction

“Where are we going to put them all?” is a common phrase heard around the academic and clinical facility corridors. Clinical placements for nursing students in inpatient settings are becoming increasingly limited, in part, due to increased numbers of new nursing programs. From 2001 to 2011, the number of registered nurse (RN) candidates taking the NCLEX- RN exam for the first time more than doubled, indicating that nursing schools are graduating significantly more students to enter professional nursing practice (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2013). The primary reasons nursing schools do not admit qualified applicants each year are the shortage of clinical teaching settings and insufficient clinical preceptors (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2015). Examining the relationships and addressing concerns, between staff RNs and nursing students, can have direct implications for the overall quality of the students' academic experiences and for the practice environment of staff nurses.

1.1. Review of the literature

Most research regarding staff RNs' relationships with nursing students has focused on student perspectives, with scant attention paid to practice implications. Few researchers have examined the effect of students during clinical rotations on staff RNs (Grindel, Patsdaughter, Medici, & Babington, 2003; Grindel, Bateman, Patsdaughter, Babington, & Medici, 2001; Hathorn, Machtmes, & Tillman, 2009; Matsumura, Callister, Palmer, Cox, & Larsen, 2004; Slaughter-Smith, Helms, & Burris, 2012; Zisberg, Bar-Tal, & Krulik, 2003). Hathorn et al. (2009) employed phenomenology to understand the lived experiences of RNs working with students, and found staff nurses admitted to expressing negative attitudes toward students by “being condescending, ignoring, or being judgmental” (2009, p. 242). Zisberg et al. (2003) conducted a quantitative observational study to measure the impact of nursing students on the quality of patient care delivered by staff RNs and found “the presence of students seemed to have a beneficial effect on nurses' performance and quality of care” (2003, p. 102).

Four studies employed the Nursing Students' Contributions to Clinical Agencies (NSCCA) survey to explore benefits and limitations of having undergraduate nursing students in acute care nursing settings during clinical rotations (Grindel et al., 2003; Grindel et al., 2001; Matsumura et al., 2004; Slaughter-Smith et al., 2012). The NSCCA survey

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focuses on effects undergraduate nursing students have on staff RN time, staff development, quality of care, personal satisfaction of the staff RNs, and unit standards and practices. The 108 nurse respondents to a nationally distributed NSCCA survey indicated that, although students may increase the workload of staff RNs, many adult medical-surgical RNs felt that students also make valuable contributions to clinical settings, individual nurses, and patient care during their clinical rotations (Grindel et al., 2003; Grindel et al., 2001). Grindel et al., 2003 reported that fewer years of RN experience correlated to greater appreciation of the contributions of students, while RNs with greater than ten years practice experience were more likely than newer RNs to view students as frustrating, time-consuming, and less appreciated by patients.

Matsumura et al. (2004) and Slaughter-Smith et al. (2012) found similar results; staff RNs demonstrated positive, yet ambivalent perceptions toward nursing students. Matsumura et al., from the results of the NSCCA emphatically stated, “the creation of a positive learning environment and a nurturing environment for mentoring is of critical importance” (2004, p. 302). The current study was conducted in an effort to support the IOM Future of Nursing report recommendation to strengthening academic pathways and enhance the quality of the RNs' student experience.

1.2. Purpose of the study

The study purpose was to elicit factors that cause satisfaction and dissatisfaction for staff RNs participating in two types of nurse student interactions: clinical rotation role-model and student preceptorship.

2. Methods

2.1. Subject and setting

The investigators invited RNs working at six acute care hospitals in two multi-hospital not-for-profit community healthcare systems, serving five counties in the southeastern United States to participate in this cross sectional descriptive study. Each of the healthcare system's Institutional Review Boards granted the study exempt status due to the anonymous survey response process. Content validity and software execution were completed by five RNs who participate as clinical rotation role-models and student preceptors. Chief nursing officers for each healthcare system emailed a questionnaire link on SurveyMonkey® (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>), to approximately 3700 RNs using each respective facility's “all nurse” distribution lists to recruit participants. The email informed the RNs that their identity would remain confidential.

2.2. Types of clinical placements

This study focused on two types of nurse student interactions as defined below: clinical rotation role-model and student preceptorship. Clinical rotation role-model is the RN managing a full assignment, with requests from a student and faculty member to perform specific tasks. At anytime the student may be observing RN patient interactions. The nurse acts as a role-model, with the faculty member having responsible for on-site supervision, training, assessment, and evaluation of the students. A faculty member is assigned a group of six to twelve nursing students. A student is assigned to one or two patients for a partial shift. This opportunity provides initial exposure in real-world clinical practice site experience.

Student preceptorship is the RN acting in the role as a preceptor, without a faculty member present. An RN and nursing student are paired to work together over several consecutive weeks for entire shifts, providing supervision, training, assessment, and evaluation. This final clinical experience provides an opportunity for nursing students to transition their roles from student to professional, enhancing clinical competence, confidence, and socialization (Bourbonnais & Kerr, 2007). In this study, RNs in both hospital systems are exposed to students from the same three schools of nursing, with similar clinical rotation and

preceptorship models. Both clinical placement experiences occur over several consecutive weeks for a total of 100–120 hours.

2.3. Instrument

Written permission was obtained to use the 54-item Nursing Students' Contributions to Clinical Agencies (NSCCA) survey. The original NSCCA survey was adapted to an online format using SurveyMonkey®, providing an anonymous response system and automated data entry. The original NSCCA developers created items for the survey using data from interviews conducted with staff nurses, managers, and nursing administrators who were responsible for student clinical rotations and student preceptorships. Of the 54 items on the NSCCA survey, 53 items used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from zero (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree), with a total possible scores range from 0 to 212. Grindel et al. (2001) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .95; the current study sample replicated the same strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .96. The final item on the questionnaire is a global item, *Overall please rate the contributions of nursing students to your clinical agency*, measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from –5 (extremely negative) to +5 (extremely positive). Two questions were added to elicit data related to the method RNs entered into the student preceptor role and desire for and type of reward for serving in a preceptor role. Data were imported directly from SurveyMonkey® to IBM SPSS for Windows version 22.

3. Results

From a single invitation to participate in the survey, 391 participants responded. Responses to each item on the survey varied between 284 and 293; 230 participants answered every item on the scale and 281 participants provided a rating to the global item. The respondents had a mean age of 48 years ($N = 250$, $SD = 11.68$) and averaged 19 years of clinical nursing practice ($N = 270$, $SD = 12.54$). Ninety-two respondents reported being student preceptors. Table 1 presents characteristics of the participants.

The responses indicated generally positive perceptions by staff RNs of students' contributions to the clinical agency based on the survey

Table 1
Characteristics of survey participants.

Characteristic	M	SD	Range
Age	47.8	12.04	22–71
Years of nursing experience	18.69	12.84	0–47
Highest nursing degree	N	%	
Vocational (LPN or LVN)	5	1.7	
Diploma	29	7.4	
Associate	127	32.5	
Baccalaureate	106	27.1	
Masters	24	6.1	
Clinical practice area			
Medical-surgical unit	142	49.1	
Critical care	46	15.9	
Perinatal	51	17.6	
Pediatrics	9	3.1	
Outpatient	18	6.2	
Emergency	15	5.2	
Rehab (long- or short-term)	8	2.8	
Employment status			
Full-time	247	85.2	
Part-time	21	7.2	
Per diem	12	4.1	
Seasonal	10	3.4	
Country of original nursing license			
U.S.A	267	92.7	
Other	21	7.3	
Nursing position			
Staff nurse (direct care)	270	94.7	
Advanced practice nurse (direct care)	4	1.4	
Non-direct care position	11	4	

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