



Nursing interns' perception of clinical competence upon completion of preceptorship experience in Saudi Arabia[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nursing interns are newly graduate students with limited real-life work experiences. These novices are in the process of enhancing their competencies in the delivery of quality nursing care with the guidance of the preceptors. Hence, it is relevant to examine the impact of preceptorship, as a teaching strategy, among nursing interns during their preceptorship years in clinical settings.

Objective: The aim of this study is to determine if the preceptorship program has provided the nursing interns the needed education in enhancing clinical competence.

Setting: The study was conducted in one of the tertiary hospitals in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Participants: Convenience sampling was used to recruit 92 undergraduate nursing interns who have completed the five-years nursing education including preceptorship.

Methods: The nursing interns completely answered the survey questionnaires which covers Benner's Competencies, Knowles' Adult Learning Theory and the Nursing Process.

Design: The study followed a mixed-methods design wherein a descriptive cross-sectional approach was used to identify factors affecting the nursing interns' perception towards clinical competence. Two open-ended questions referring to the improvement of internship program and competency were concurrently collected which was the qualitative portion of the study.

Results: The preceptorship program enhanced the preceptees competencies in the clinical setting primarily in priority-setting with acutely ill patients, multitasking and demonstrating complex nursing skills. The majority of the nursing interns perceived preceptorship as a constructive experience. The availability, approachable attitude, and trustworthiness of the preceptor were viewed as influential factors in improving the interns' clinical competence. Variations were significant with phases of internship and type of school. Furthermore, results showed positive correlation between the nursing interns' efficacy and clinical competencies in professional behavior, general performance, and core nursing skills.

Conclusion: Preceptorship program positively impacts nursing interns' skills in handling actual patients in clinical setting. Hence, the preceptorship program is an effective teaching strategy which advances the novice to the next stage of developing clinical competence.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of the health care system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and changes in the health care needs of the population, as a result of affluent lifestyles, demands an increase in the proportion of clinically competent nurses in the Kingdom (Aldossary et al., 2008; Maben and Griffiths, 2008). The acuity of managing illnesses, patient status changes, and other mandatory nursing responsibilities demand supervision from clinically competent nurses. However, the kingdom Arabia faces chronic shortage of nurses, with the majority of the nursing

workforce foreign trained (Al-Mahmoud et al., 2008; Almalki, 2012; Cruz, 2017). Nursing is perceived as a less desirable profession by Saudis because of working conditions, limited remuneration, and perceived ambiguity in gender roles (Almutairi and McCarthy, 2012; Mansour and Watson, 2014). As a response, Saudi Arabia encourages Saudi nationals to register in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) courses and even hire nurses overseas in order to respond to the lack of nurses in their medical cities and other health care facilities.

The nursing education in Saudi Arabia is offered by both the public and private sectors which aimed at producing quality graduates that

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will help resolve the nursing shortage. The public nursing colleges typically have their own established hospitals and medical centers where they expose their students for clinical trainings. The nursing education in Saudi Arabia is a 4-years bachelor's degree program which requires another 1-year internship practice in clinical settings. The student is recognized as graduate after finishing the first four years of both academic and clinical learning process involving theoretical foundations in nursing, nursing care management and nursing professional development. Then, the newly graduate Saudi nurse is required to register in the National Internship Program which involves intensive training clinical courses with actual and real cases. In internship, the preceptorship model is followed wherein the newly graduate nurse is recognized as a preceptee supervised by a clinically-trained preceptor. Internship is included in the nursing education in Saudi Arabia in order to provide opportunity of nursing graduates to be more exposed in health care facilities and further enhance their clinical competence.

The internship program has brought significant changes in the field of nursing education in KSA with a preceptorship model used as a strategic approach in mentoring nursing interns. The primary objective is to assist nursing interns, the preceptee, develop clinical competence or the competency in the actual working environment supervised by the preceptors (Bridie and Siobhan, 2010). In the clinical environment, the nursing interns will experience and be exposed to actual patient care management which is integral in the development of clinical competence (Althiga et al., 2017). Nursing interns must be prepared to enter a complex environment with patients in multifaceted cases which demands higher level of nursing clinical competencies. In preceptorship, the nursing intern or preceptee is trained under a licensed nurse preceptor (Billings and Halstead, 2009). Preceptors serve as role models and their task is to facilitate educational activities by applying nursing management concepts to actual patients. The preceptees are guided with enhanced clinical comfort, confidence, and competency by the preceptors. The preceptor leads the nursing interns to actively participate as one of the actual members of the clinical team. The preceptors in Saudi Arabia are licensed and clinically trained nurses working in the health care facilities where the nursing interns are registered and assigned. The preceptors have undergone series of orientation and trainings conducted by their organization. The nursing interns are required to complete the 12-month internship program in different areas or specialized units in the hospitals. There have been relevant studies about NIP in Saudi Arabia where the impact of preceptorship on the development of clinical competence has been examined. Al-Neami et al. (2014), measured female nursing interns' competence from the start and during preceptorship experience and found out that the attitude did not improved significantly unlike knowledge and skills. The development of attitude can be a direct personal experience or observation wherein the individual is beginning to identify caring in personal perspective then in terms of professional identity which takes more time than knowledge and skills (Al-Neami et al., 2014). Almazwaghi (2013) explored the perceived competencies of nursing interns in the intensive care units which indicated that special and intensive trainings are still needed so that interns are equip to work as intensive care unit professional nurse. Dorgham (2013) showed stated that being satisfied with the internship program does ensure that interns acquired high levels of clinical competence. Moreover, Althiga et al. (2017) compared preceptees and the preceptors' views about internship and results showed that significant differences exist. The differences were found on their perceptions about the internship training, importance of clinical teaching, and development of clinical competence.

The chronic shortage of nurses and the low supply of Saudi nursing graduates will increase workload and compromise the acceptance of nurses to preceptor role. If so, the supervision of preceptees will be limited since nurses has to complete additional clinical tasks. Consequently, the nursing interns may only develop low level of clinical competence through self-discovery, or conversely, the clinical environment may limit their ability to practice clinical skills. In the

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, existing studies on preceptorship and clinical competence enhancement are limited. There are only few literatures focusing on internship programs in nursing. The aim of this study was to explore nursing interns' perceptions towards the development of clinical competence during preceptorship. Nursing interns face challenges on many levels (Dorgham, 2013), experience anxiety (Chen et al., 2011), and become inflexible (Dorgham, 2013) due to their limited knowledge and environmental factors. A secondary aim was to explore the perceptions of nursing interns of the development of their nursing professional behavior, performance and skills.

2. Background of the Study

The transition period from a nursing intern to a professional nurse may lead to increased feelings of anxiety, depression and frustration which consequently lead to absenteeism, lowwork productivity, job dissatisfaction, burnout and ultimately leaving the nursing profession. Retention of nurses is critical to address nursing shortages (Almalki, 2012; Dyess and Parker, 2012; Hillman and Foster, 2011; Missen et al., 2014). According to the study of Parker et al. (2014) in Australia, nursing graduates reported feeling disillusioned and on the verge of rethinking their choice of nursing as a career. This additional stress may lead to early termination of their first position and the possibility of leaving nursing. Previous studies conducted in Taiwan and America showed that the nursing interns from other countries claim to often face challenges in role transition due to insufficient experiences, limited exposure to clinical practice and patient management, deficient application of critical thinking skills, and environmental factors reflecting the complexity of the hospital environment (Chen et al., 2011; Sandau and Halm, 2010).

The preceptorship is considered as a transition period where nursing interns has to get engaged with clinical nursing practice. It has been regarded in other studies as satisfying which consequently improves the nursing intern's competencies (Cubit and Ryan, 2011; Gideman et al., 2011; Malouf and West, 2011; Khan et al., 2012). The program helps nursing interns demonstrate leadership skills in problem solving, priority setting, decision-making, delegation of tasks and accountability by the preceptors (Haggery et al., 2013; Institute of Medicine, 2011; Ferguson and Day, 2007).

In the Saudi Arabia, interns rotate through the hospital in four phases. In the first phase, the interns will attend the New Internship General Orientation (NIGO for two weeks). Then, the nursing intern will have a 20-week clinical exposure in medical and surgical units which is considered as Phase II. In Phase III, the interns will have a 20-week rotation in clinical areas which require specializations such as critical care and emergency department. Lastly, another phase is elective, wherein the interns will have a 10-week rotation to areas which they most prefer. The learning experiences offer the nursing interns the chance of working from basic to specialized clinical areas to help them choose their preferred field of nursing. The preceptors evaluate and monitor the nursing interns' performance over the 12 month-period. The interns are paid and have to comply with the 12 h shift during working days per month. Part of the internship experience is the recall of theoretical nursing knowledge done in orientation programs and series of evaluation. The interns can only perform procedures with the approval and supervision of the preceptors. The preceptors test and facilitate the improvement of interns in theoretical knowledge, skills and attitude towards becoming a competent nurse practitioner. The interns have to complete the internship program to fully received their college credentials. Also, they have to take and pass the licensure exam before they can practice the profession of nursing in various health care facilities in Saudi Arabia.

The transition of nursing students to practitioners has been reported in previous studies as more stressful compared to other transitions during the academic period in nursing education (Parker et al., 2014; Bott et al., 2011). The interns are considered instrumental in evaluating

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