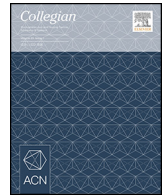




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Student nurses' transformation process during a clinical practicum in a two-year bachelor's program

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 April 2017

Received in revised form 5 November 2017

Accepted 11 November 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Student nurses

Stress

Clinical practicum

Identity

Transformation

ABSTRACT

Background: The global nursing shortage has highlighted the role of the clinical practicum in nurses' training. Studies have indicated that student nurses suffer from high stress levels during clinical practicums. However, few studies have evaluated how student nurses effectively cope with these stressors to adapt to their surroundings.

Aim: To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the transformation process of student nurses during clinical practicums, including stressful encounters, interactions in their interpersonal relationships, coping strategies, and the relationship between self-identity and challenges.

Methods: Eight Taiwanese student nurses in the second year of a two-year bachelor's program served as study subjects. A qualitative research design was adopted.

Findings: Three theme clusters were identified: challenges, reactions, and transformation. The student nurses struggled with challenges in interpersonal relationships, improving their professional knowledge and skills, and adapting to negative learning environments. The student nurses became more confident in their abilities by improving interpersonal interaction abilities, professional knowledge and skills, and professional ethics as well as by preserving family bonds.

Discussion: The student nurses' clinical practicum experiences present severe challenges. Negative learning environments may influence a student's professional identity. The student nurses recognized this issue and developed their self-identity through interactions nurses recognized this issue and developed their self-identity based on interactions between themselves with others. Conclusion The results demonstrate the key aspects of student nurses' transformation that facilitate the development of self-identity and enable students to evolve into mature individuals. The findings may help new student nurses prepare for the challenges of practicum experiences.

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1. Introduction

The clinical practicum is an essential stage in nursing career exploration for student nurses. A severe national shortage of nurses has resulted in concern regarding student nurses' clinical placement experiences (Taylor, Brammer, Cameron, & Perrin, 2015). Taylor et al. (2015) found that student nurses' satisfaction levels with their clinical placement affect their determination or willingness to graduate and register. Hence, the clinical practicum, as a catalyst, motivates students to become bona fide nurses by gener-

ating new and complex challenges they have never experienced. Mezirow (1978) indicated that when an interpretive meaning perspective no longer effectively addresses anomalies in a new situation, a transformation is required to adapt to new situations. The transformation changes the manner in which individuals learn and establish new meanings of the world. Therefore, it is critical to understand student nurses' narratives by reviewing, integrating, and reflecting upon their clinical practicum experiences, which may disorient them or lead them to success in their professional careers. Thus, the objective of this study is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the transformation process of student nurses during a clinical practicum by examining their experience of stress, their interpersonal relationships, their interactions with Chinese culture, their coping strategies, and the relationship between identity and challenges in the clinical practicum.

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Summary of relevance**Problem**

Although many studies have indicated that student nurses suffer from high levels of stress in clinical placements, few studies have evaluated how students transform themselves to adapt to their surroundings.

What is already known

A successful transformation process during the clinical practicum can help student nurses adapt and develop effectively when becoming registered nurses.

What this paper adds

Student nurses were found to struggle with serious challenges in their interpersonal relationships, with difficulties improving their professional knowledge and skills, and with negative learning situations. Chinese culture may foster academic incivility as well. The transformation process of these students is discussed so that nursing educators can help students make a more successful career transition.

2. Background

Before student nurses become registered nurses, they must undergo stringent clinical practicum training. According to [Blomberg et al. \(2014\)](#), 43% of student nurses suffer high levels of stress during their clinical practicums. Several studies have indicated that student nurses experience various forms of stress because of complex medical situations, interactions with patients and other nurses, different clinical setting characteristics, homework, and tests ([Blomberg et al., 2014](#); [Chen & Hung, 2014](#)). These stresses can have various adverse biological, psychological, and social effects, such as poor social adaptability, unhappiness, low self-esteem, anxiety, and sleep disturbances ([Bartlett, Taylor, & Nelson, 2016](#); [Chen & Hung, 2014](#); [Sun et al., 2016](#)). Although student nurses encounter a variety of stressors during the clinical practicum, a nurse's character and personal resilience can help him or her overcome these obstacles. Student nurses can apply coping strategies, such as transference (e.g., overeating, sleeping, watching movies, and exercising), remaining optimistic, problem solving, and using a support system to confront stress ([Chen & Hung, 2014](#); [Nelwati, McKenna, & Plummer, 2013](#)). In addition, some student nurses recognize that stressors associated with a clinical practicum may improve their knowledge and strengthen their spirit ([Dinmohammadi, Jalali, & Peyrovi, 2016](#)). Student nurses can gain a sense of achievement through mentor support and by gaining greater awareness of patient needs ([James, Beattie, Shepherd, Armstrong, & Wilkinson, 2016](#)). Several of the above-cited studies indicate that students can overcome the stress of a clinical practicum and build self-confidence as nurses.

[Tseng, Wang, and Weng \(2013\)](#) found that student nurses may apply previous clinical care experiences to predict and control future difficulties. That is, student nurses may utilize previous clinical experiences in a process of realization and comprehension, which facilitates transformation. These clinical learning experiences, which can be applied in a future nursing workplace, serve as a foundation for nursing competence. [Mezirow \(1978\)](#) noted that "transformation" refers to a non-reversible shift in one's meaning perspective toward greater inclusiveness, discrimination, openness or permeability (to other ideas), flexibility, reflexivity, and autonomy. Thus, transformation is regarded as one's maturity gradient. When learners confront new dilemmas, they generate a new meaning perspective and reconstruct reality to view themselves, their roles, and their relationships in new ways. [Sandvik, Eriksson, and Hilli \(2014\)](#) noted that as students become nurses, clinical education should focus more on the students' transformation.

There are various nursing education systems in Taiwan, including a five-year associate degree in nursing (AND) program and bachelor's programs at vocational universities (two- or four-year programs) ([Li, Yu, Liu, Shieh, & Yang, 2014](#)). To enroll in a two-year nursing college, students must have completed the five-year AND program ([Li et al., 2014](#)). The period required for training professional nurses is long. For students at two-year nursing colleges, surviving the high level of stress in a clinical environment requires the ability to transform their thinking, personality, and capacity for resilience. Thus, this study examines the transformation of student nurses' meaning perspectives across a variety of clinical practicums. The aims of the study are as follows: (1) to identify student nurses' stressors and their reactions to such stressors, (2) to understand how Chinese culture influences students' interpersonal relationships, and (3) to investigate student nurses' coping strategies and their sense of identity as they face serious challenges during a clinical practicum.

3. Participants, ethics and methods

3.1. Research design

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive design, utilizing semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews. To inquire in depth into the participants' personal experiences, the authors collected the experiential narratives of the participants based on [Patton \(2015\)](#), using several interview principles and skills, such as asking open-ended questions, being clear, observing (the body language of social cues), probing as appropriate, being both empathic and neutral, making transitions, distinguishing types of questions and staying present throughout the process.

3.2. Ethical considerations

This study protocol was approved by the National Cheng Kung University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC "full board" No. 103-042-2). After the study was explained, all participants were invited to sign a consent form for the interview and to permit us to digitally voice record the interview. The participants could suspend or withdraw from the interview or sound recording at any time. To maintain confidentiality, the participants' names were replaced by numbers.

3.3. Recruitment and data collection

Snowball sampling was used. The authors recruited student nurses whose perspectives would be insightful for this study. These students were then asked to invite their classmates to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) have completed the five-year AND program and be enrolled in the two-year nursing college at one of three Taiwanese universities; (2) currently undergoing final clinical placements; (3) have experienced a clinical practicum in at least six departments for eight months during the five-year AND program (including fundamentals of nursing care, the medical department, the surgical department, the pediatric department, the psychiatric department, the gynecology and obstetrics department, and the public health center); and (4) have completed three phases of the clinical practicum, with 4 weeks per practicum, during the two-year nursing college program. Based on these criteria, eight second-year student nurses were invited to participate and these participants' data indicated saturation ([Table 1](#)).

To create a comfortable and safe interview environment, the interviewer asked the participants to select an appropriate interview location. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 60 min. We collected data over a period of five months and asked preset questions focused on the following themes: comparing their

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