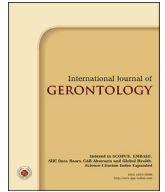


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Original Article

Geriatric Nursing and Long Term Care Content in Baccalaureate Nursing Programs in Taiwan

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SUMMARY

Background: The population aged 65 years old and above is expected to dramatically increase annually in Taiwan. Health care professionals need to be prepared to better serve the aged and disabled population. The purpose of this study is to survey Taiwan's current Geriatric Nursing (GN) or Long Term Care (LTC) courses offered in baccalaureate nursing programs.

Methods: A descriptive research design was used and detailed checklist review was applied. Data were obtained from the official websites for the content review of Taiwan's current baccalaureate programs in GN and/or LTC course offered in baccalaureate nursing programs.

Results: The results showed that the content of the GN course included aging process, communication, ethical, elderly activity, health promotion, nutrition and dementia care. LTC courses focus on the current system of LTC, policy, management of LTC institutions, ethical issues in LTC, and various types of LTC services such as day care, home care and LTC facilities.

Conclusion: The survey findings indicated that GN and LTC education must be recognized by providing required stand-alone courses and interdisciplinary education in nursing curricula. These courses should be included in curricular design and innovations to ensure nursing students to acquire strong competence for the future through education.

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1. Introduction

World Health Organization (WHO) reported that the health workforce education to improve the quality and relevance of health workers to meet the needs of the 21st century and contribute to better population health outcomes.¹ The International Council of Nurses (ICN) also claim that more numbers of student nurses should be equipped with gerontology knowledge to provide professional nursing care for elder and people of disabilities.²

The number of people aged 65 years old and above accounted for over 13.2% of the Taiwan population in 2016, and it is expected to increase to 20% by 2025.³ To meet this trend, the Taiwanese government implemented a ten-year plan to develop aging-in-place network for the Long Term Care (LTC) system beginning in

2007. Since 2010, Taiwan's Ministry of Health and Welfare has provided annual professional LTC training programs to all health care providers to enhance their LTC-related knowledge and care attitude toward LTC clients. Furthermore, the Long-term Care Services Act was enacted as the principal legal basis for developing comprehensive LTC services in Taiwan in June 2015.³ All LTC service providers are required to be prepared with LTC competence through initial education to practice in LTC settings by the end of 2017.

Despite this urgent issue, few nurses have been adequately prepared to care for the elderly and disabled.^{4,5} It even appears that student nurses do not always have the Gerontology/Geriatric Nursing (GN) or LTC course to address this major concern.⁶ More and better prepared student nurses are needed to fulfill aged and disabled population care needs.² As a result, GN and/or LTC curriculum development has been enclosed in nursing education in recent years. However, reviews on this development revealed that the majority of studies were descriptive studies found in the US.^{7–11} Compared with previous studies on the barriers to gerontology education, lack of clear articulation and standards for gerontology

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curricula and practice competencies were rated by almost half of the respondents as important barriers.^{4,12–14} In addition, the GN or LTC curriculums only have been offered as an elective course in most Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) programs.⁴ Lack of consensus planning in curriculum development has been observed in most nursing programs.

To reverse this trend, American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) developed a specified program in 2000 to define and revise nurse programs in the US. A document entitled “Older Adults: Recommended Baccalaureate Competencies and Curricular Guidelines for Geriatric Nursing Care” was published to introduce geriatric core competencies and contents.⁶ Since then, the majority of studies from the US revealed that gerontology content incorporated into curricula based on AACN guideline have been increased.^{7–11}

Studies on reviewing GN content in baccalaureate nursing programs to evaluate the changes in gerontology content, stand-alone courses, and faculty preparation were found between 1997 and 2003.^{4,12} Results indicated that gerontological preparations, after the implementation of the John A. Hartford Foundation Institute, the growing shortage of faculty with qualifications were still observed. In 2003, 76% of BSN programs reported at least one full-time faculty expert in gerontological nursing. In addition, most of the nursing curriculum offered GN course as elective ones or by integrating geriatric content into other nursing courses, such as Nursing Fundamentals (67% in 1997 & 94% in 2003), Health Assessment (88% in 1997 & 97% in 2003), Adult Health/Medical-Surgical Nursing (79% in 1997 & 98% in 2003), and Community Health Nursing (89% in 1997 & 93% in 2003).

Gerontology nursing, or geriatric nursing, is simply defined as nursing care for elderly patients with a focus not only on illness but on overall health and wellness. GN draws on knowledge about complex factors affecting the health of older adults who have one or more chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, arthritis, hearing impairment, or a form of dementia such as Alzheimer's disease. The branch of GN concerned with the care of the older population, including promotion of healthy aging, prevention, assessment, and management of physiological, pathological, psychological, and sociological problems. LTC is to provide custodial and non-skilled care, such as assisting with ordinary daily tasks. LTC involves providing a level of medical care requiring the expertise of skilled practitioners, including to address multiple chronic conditions associated with the older or disabled populations. It is encouraged that more BSN programs could adopt stand-alone GN or LTC course or reconceptualize other courses into GN course to merge the Geriatric Long Term Care (GLTC) content.^{4,12,14} GLTC is supposed to be various services helping meet living and some medical needs of older adults with a chronic impairment or disability who cannot care for themselves for long periods of time. GLTC focuses on not only the older adults' care problems but health needs associated with disability that occurs during the aging process.

A national mail survey of all baccalaureate programs accredited by AACN, and the results demonstrated that more than half of universities integrated gerontology contents into baccalaureate curriculum.¹⁴ Furthermore, students have to meet the most important task to care for the elderly and disabled population. Most study results indicated that if GN curriculum content is integrated into baccalaureate nursing programs, that could improve students' perception of GLTC competency, including critical thinking, communication, assessment, and technical skills.^{7,12–14} Baccalaureate GN, LTC or GLTC curriculums were designed to increase student's care ability of the elder and/or disabled people. Furthermore, most students perceived helpful for their nursing role development after GN, LTC or GLTC courses.¹⁴

Establishing and applying academic standards, entry-to-practice competencies and faculty development are important to improve quality education, practice standards and accreditation capacities of GLTC curriculums. Unfortunately, few nursing students have been exposed to specialized knowledge about care of older adults or disabled people over the world.¹⁵ As mentioned earlier, GLTC focuses on the older adults' care problems and health needs associated with disability that occurs during the aging process. The nursing competence of older adults or disabled people and standards of GLTC nursing education curriculum investigation have been found lacking in Taiwan. Nursing students need to be cultivated and receive training in geriatric nursing and long term care education to offer high-quality care to elder and disabled population.

2. Research aim

This study aims to survey current GN or LTC curriculum offered in baccalaureate nursing programs in Taiwan. Three questions were posed:

- 2.1 What is the situation of GN or LTC in baccalaureate nursing education in Taiwan?
- 2.2 Which specific GN or LTC content and competencies are included in baccalaureate nursing education programs in Taiwan?
- 2.3 What qualifications are the educators equipped to teach the courses in the care for the elder and disabled population?

3. Method

3.1. Research design

A descriptive research design was used.

3.2. Sample

All baccalaureate education, universities of general ($n = 17$) and science and technology ($n = 13$) offering bachelor nursing education program in Taiwan were noted. New programs including 3 general universities and 2 universities of science and technology were excluded since no student has graduated from the program yet. Finally, 14 general universities and 11 universities of science and technology were selected.

3.3. Data collection

Data was collected from March to April in 2015. A checklist was developed by the first author to identify GN/LTC curriculum design, content and faculty preparation situation. Through detailed review on each program's official website, the data were assessed for undergraduate nursing programs at each nursing university and university of science and technology in Taiwan.

3.4. Ethical considerations

All information analyzed were data obtained from the university websites. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Council (HREC code: 103-354).

3.5. Data analysis

After data collection, the results were analyzed. A descriptive analysis was carried out at the level of the total samples.

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