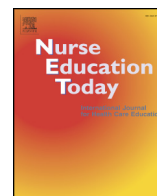




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Tools to reduce first year nursing students' anxiety levels prior to undergoing objective structured clinical assessment (OSCA) and how this impacts on the student's experience of their first clinical placement

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SUMMARY

Background: One form of assessment that tests students' theoretical skills and confidence in their clinical practice is known as the Objective Structured Clinical Assessment (OSCA). Traditionally it was first launched from medical education, and is now being incorporated by other disciplines, such as nursing.

Objectives: This review seeks to present the best available evidence into strategies that help reduce first year nursing students' anxiety levels prior to undergoing OSCA and clinical placement.

Search Strategy: A systematic literature search was performed using Medline and CINAHL.

Selection Criteria: This review considered any English language original research published between 2005 and 2013.

Results: A literature search located 117 articles. Eight articles were identified as meeting the inclusion in criteria. Majority of studies reported simulation session prior to the OSCA increased students confidence and reduced their anxiety levels. This resulted in students' reporting that they valued the OSCA as a worthwhile assessment. However there were four major themes: that students were anxious about attending the OSCA; that adequate preparation was seen as a coping strategy; that simulation was a further cause for anxiety; and that the simulation experience could also be used as an OSCA tool.

Conclusions: Students who have been exposed to simulation scenarios before the OSCA are able to cope much better during the OSCA. Therefore, it is highly recommended to incorporate simulation scenarios into the nursing curricula for first year nursing students' clinical units to help reduce their anxiety levels prior to OSCA.

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Introduction

The objective structured clinical assessment (OSCA), also known as the objective structured clinical exam (OSCE), was developed in medical education during the 1970s (Harden et al., 1975). Today the OSCA is a practical assessment tool used to examine whether students are prepared adequately for the clinical setting (Merriman and Westcott, 2010). It is a process where students demonstrate their competence under a simulated scenario (Watson et al., 2002). Consequently, it demonstrates if students are competent to perform specific nursing skills under examination conditions. Unlike a written exam, which tests theoretical knowledge, the OSCA is a different experience because it tests practical and clinical skills. Recent research by Fidment (2012) has

evaluated the attitudes of healthcare professionals who have returned to study towards the OSCA and simulation. Both of these assessment tools are embedded in healthcare curricula across disciplines such as nursing, midwifery and physiotherapy in universities worldwide. Fidment's article remains relevant to a discussion about first year students' attitudes to OSCAs and simulation because it demonstrates the feelings and beliefs of all students when preparing for the OSCA and simulation. We argue that students on their first clinical placement experience the same feelings and beliefs that Fidment identified as occurring before and during the OSCA and simulation. Therefore, both the OSCA and simulation can be seen as important tools in preparing students for their first clinical placement so that it is a positive learning experience.

Current research about OSCAs is focussed on the implementation and evaluation of an OSCA (Brand and Schoonheim-Klein, 2009; Furlong et al., 2005; Major, 2005). Despite its growing use as an assessment tool, currently there is limited literature available which discusses students' perceptions such as the lived experience of the OSCA.

This literature review will address concerns such as student anxiety, OSCA preparation (coping skills and preparation for clinical) and

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simulation. According to Thomas (2005) a student may become anxious when placed in a stressful situation such as an OSCA. Therefore, all students need to be taught to manage the emotional and psychological effects of their OSCAs in a constructive way in order to develop the confidence they require to become skilled registered nurses (Thomas, 2005). Fidment (2012) explored students' experience of an OSCA which revealed three main themes which are: student's anxiety levels; preparation as seen as a coping strategy; and simulation. Another theme was that simulation could be used as an OSCA, thereby assessing students' clinical knowledge in an environment that closely mimics the clinical setting. The findings demonstrate OSCA and simulation enhances student confidence and enables them to be more competent prior to clinical placement therefore making the clinical setting a more effective learning environment.

AIM

The aim of the study is to investigate the best possible evidence into strategies that reduce first year nursing students' anxiety levels prior to undergoing the OSCA and first clinical placement experience.

Method

Design

A systematic review method was used to explore first year nursing students' OSCA and clinical placement experience. The review followed the steps outlined by Shea et al. (2007). These steps were: searching the literature; critical appraisal of selected journal articles; reading and extracting data from journal articles; synthesising data into a summary table; and identifying major themes which form the recommendations.

Search Strategy

The review consisted of an initial search of CINAHL and MEDLINE from 2005 (when the OSCA experience was first discussed in the literature) to 2013 and was limited to English language. The keywords used included: First year nursing students; baccalaureate nursing student; OSCA; objective structured clinical assessment; OSCE; Objective Structured Clinical Evaluation or Exam; clinical assessment skills; practical assessment; clinical simulation and experience/s. Once identified, the reference lists of articles were consulted to see if they contained further relevant articles.

Initially, the literature search identified 117 articles. However, after reviewing the title and abstract against the inclusion criteria, 8 articles were found to meet these criteria (Table 1).

Inclusion Criteria

All primary research that reported on nursing students' experiences of the OSCA published in English language were included.

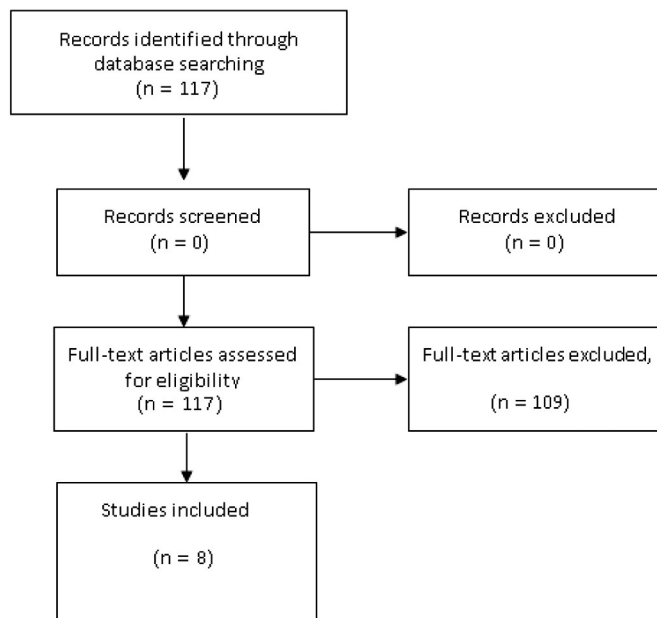
Exclusion Criteria

Observational studies were not included as they were only reporting current practice and do not assess the subjective experience of the student

Findings

Of the 8 papers included in this review, 5 reported quantitative studies, 2 outlined a qualitative study and 1 further study described a mixed method investigations. All studies reported research undertaken in either the USA ($n = 3$; 37.5%), UK ($n = 4$; 50%), or Australia ($n = 1$; 12.5%). Given the heterogeneity of methods used, the analysis was undertaken using thematic analysis. From this analysis 4 themes emerged,

Table 1
Prisma statement.



first, anxiety about the OSCA, second, preparation seen as a coping strategy, third, simulation as a further cause for anxiety, and finally, simulation as an OSCA experience (Table 2).

Anxiety

According to Fidment (2012) anxiety is an issue for undergraduate nurses undertaking an OSCA. However, Fidment cited Rushforth (as cited in Fidment, 2012) to suggest that anxiety could be a positive influence equipping students with appropriate coping mechanisms and teaching them how to manage stressful situations. Cazzell and Rodriguez (2011) found that many students described the experience as provoking intense anxiety. However this was often due to organisational issues such as inconsistencies with instructions, the involvement of staff, and the scenario setup. This led to the student's perception of a loss of control. Another qualitative study focused on students' perceptions of the OSCA. Abdo and Ravert (2006) agreed that the anxiety felt by students was a positive experience because the OSCA scenario prepared them for the clinical experience by adequately testing technical skills such as taking vital signs. Also all students felt to some extent the OSCA adequately tested clinical decision-making skills (Abdo and Ravert, 2006). These are two of the few studies available that examines how students perceive the OSCA experience (Cazzell and Rodriguez, 2011).

Preparation as a Coping Strategy

Fidment (2012) found that student preparation prior to the OSCA was identified as a key component to reducing students' anxiety levels. Scenario-based simulation prior to their OSCA also improved their performance during the OSCA but was also a reported further cause of anxiety. This view was also described by Kable et al. (2012) who found that all first year students agreed that simulation contributed to their learning and helped them to achieve the course and session objectives. On the other hand, a study conducted by Alinier et al. (2006) discovered that students who lacked confidence did not encounter less anxiety prior to the OSCA through simulation training. However, in this study

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