



Review

Evaluation of dementia education programs for pre-registration healthcare students—A review of the literature



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SUMMARY

Objectives: In an aging society, the number of people living with dementia is rapidly increasing. Health care students receive little input on dementia during their pre-registration education, hence there is a requirement to improve education to work with this client group. The review aimed to focus on education on working with people with dementia for pre-registration healthcare students.

Design: A comprehensive review of the literature.

Data Sources: Online databases Medline, PsychInfo, CINAHL, Science Direct and PubMed were used.

Review Methods: The studies were selected according to the following criteria: main focus on education and training on working with people with dementia in pre-registration healthcare programs. Reports that described a training program but did not include evaluation were excluded. For inclusion, studies had to be published in English between January 2007 and March 2014. Identified papers were screened and reviewed by the three authors.

Results: Nine studies met the inclusion criteria. Most studies were based in North America, predominantly in nursing and medical education. Educational interventions chiefly aimed to improve students' knowledge, comfort level and attitudes toward people with dementia. It was shown that theoretical input alone did not give students the necessary skills to work with people with dementia. Educational interventions were most effective when a practice based experience was preceded by theoretical preparation.

Conclusion: Most of the findings were positive, demonstrating the potential to improve students' knowledge, attitude and comfort level, however methods and evaluation were not always sufficiently reported, making them difficult to use or replicate. This review highlights the need for studies with rigorous methods to determine evidence based best practice for all those working with people with dementia in order to provide effective care and improve their quality of life.

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Introduction

With a rapidly growing aging population internationally, there is an increasing demand for healthcare professionals to have appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to care effectively for older people and people with dementia. According to the *Alzheimer's Society* (2012) it is estimated that there are 800,000 people living with dementia in the UK with predicted growth to over a million by 2021. These figures are reflected by the *World Health Organization* (WHO) (2012a, 2012b) that estimates that 35.6 million people worldwide are living with dementia and anticipates that this figure will double by 2030. The global challenge that dementia presents has been recognized with 2013 seeing the G8 holding the first global dementia summit.

The WHO define dementia as "...a syndrome – usually of a chronic or progressive nature – in which there is deterioration in cognitive function (i.e. the ability to process thought) beyond what might be expected from normal aging. It affects memory, thinking, orientation, comprehension, calculation, learning capacity, language, and judgment. Consciousness is not affected. The impairment in cognitive function is commonly accompanied, and occasionally preceded, by deterioration in emotional control, social behavior, or motivation. Dementia is caused by a variety of diseases and injuries that primarily or secondarily affect the brain, such as Alzheimer's disease or stroke." (WHO, 2012a, 2012b, no page).

It is evident in the health and education literature that interest in improving dementia education is increasing with a number of studies highlighting the importance of adapting a person-centered approach in order to maintain personhood as dementia develops (Chenoweth et al., 2009). However it is also recognized that dementia education and training for pre-registration healthcare students are limited. These limitations are reported in reviews in medical pre-registration programs in the UK (StClair Tullo and Gordon, 2013), Europe

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(Tsolaki et al., 2010) and the USA (Nagle et al., 2013) and other undergraduate health and social care programs in the UK (Pulsford et al., 2007). In the study by Pulsford et al. (2007) social work, adult and learning disability nursing programs surveyed received a mean of 3 hour teaching related to dementia during their entire pre-registration program, and mental health nursing and occupational therapy received slightly more with 14 and 7 h respectively. In relation to healthcare delivery in England and Wales, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines released in 2011 call for managers of people working with people with dementia in healthcare to ensure that staff are given appropriate training to develop the skills they need. Training and development for the current qualified workforce are essential, but there is also a need to consider the future workforce. This requires embedding education and training earlier in pre-registration healthcare programs to carry forward appropriate attitudes and skills for working with people with dementia. As Miller et al. (2010) purport, there are learning modules that all healthcare workers need to undertake regardless of their profession, working with people with dementia fits this model.

This literature review aimed to explore the range and variety of training programs designed to prepare future healthcare professionals to work with people with dementia to determine best practice in pre-registration education and identify the methods of evaluation used. The intention was to use this information to help design a program of education that could be used with pre-registration healthcare students from a number of disciplines to be taught either interdisciplinary or in individual disciplines.

Methods

After the aim of the study was framed, the search was conducted between November 2012 and April 2014 and included literature from January 2007 until March 2014, in order to obtain the most recent and relevant literature on studies focusing on training programs on dementia. Furthermore, the NICE guidelines were issued in November 2006 in England and Wales, prompting the need to ascertain how these guidelines were being implemented and how they related to an international context. The focus of the search was on education and training on working with people with dementia in pre-registration healthcare programs. It did not however include studies focusing on education on medical treatment, diagnosis and management.

All educational interventions that mention dementia have been included regardless of the stage of dementia on which they focus. Reports that described a training program but did not include any evaluation were excluded. Education and training programs in qualified professionals and support workers were more prolific (for example Clare et al., 2013 and Goyder et al., 2012 in the UK; Kuske et al., 2009 in Germany; Beer et al., 2011 in Australia; Galvin et al., 2010 in USA). However as the learning starting point for the participants, as well as the context, were significantly different to pre-registration education, it was decided to exclude these studies for the purposes of this review. Nevertheless they provided a reference point as many focused on dementia awareness, attitudes, communication and quality of life in people with dementia.

Databases Medline, PsychInfo, CINAHL and PubMed were searched using the following search terms: healthcare students and dementia or Alzheimer's and education or training or program(me). We also used discipline specific search terms such as physiotherapy or nursing or medicine to expand our search. Grey literature using a 'Google' search and references cited in relevant publications were used to find further studies. The quality of identified studies was considered. Due to the limited number of studies fitting the criteria, it was decided not to exclude studies on the basis of quality but this is reported (in the table and in strengths and limitations of the studies). The evidence has been summarized and, within the limited scope of the studies, the findings have been interpreted.

Results

There were a substantial number of studies in the field of medicine, but in many cases the focus was on treatment, diagnosis and management of patients with dementia, rather than on the skills or attitudes needed for working with people with dementia, these were outside the remit of this review. Studies identified were, academic, practice based or a combination of the two. It was decided to include a practice only study as "Placement education is a large and core component of the undergraduate learning experience." (Kell and Jones, 2007: Page 273). Nine studies met the inclusion criteria (see Table 1). Seven were based in the USA, one in Canada and one in Australia. The interventions described were in medical programs ($n = 3$), undergraduate nursing programs ($n = 5$) and undergraduate audiology and speech and language pathology programs ($n = 1$). Of the included studies, four used multiple methods, three were qualitative and two quantitative.

Aims of the Education/Training Programs

The aims of the learning programs were reported in most cases, however there were some examples where they were not explicit but implied. For instance, Robinson and Cubit (2007) reported the findings from students' experience during a placement in an elder care setting without indicating what the aims/objectives of the interventions were. Similarly Paquette et al. (2010) implied that a simulation experience will prepare students for clinical practice. However some interventions were more specific and indicated that they were designed to improve participants' knowledge or understanding of dementia (Jefferson et al., 2012; Paquette et al., 2010). Ross (2012) on the other hand aimed to describe the incorporation of service learning in an undergraduate Gerontology nursing course which was part of a Baccalaureate degree in nursing.

A number of studies specifically focused on training aimed to improve students' perceptions and attitudes to people with dementia (George et al., 2011, 2013; Kaf et al., 2011), with one aiming to introduce students to career opportunities in working with older people (Jefferson et al., 2012). In relation to meeting the psychosocial needs of people with dementia, Jordan and Church (2013) aimed to increase the students' self-efficacy and Paquette et al. (2010) measured students' comfort in working with people with dementia. The intervention described in the Jonas-Simpson et al. (2012) study aimed to help diminish unnecessary suffering experienced by people with dementia and their family members especially those linked with misunderstanding, judgment and stigma. Although all the studies inherently addressed communication skills by the nature of the learning activities, only one study specifically described aims to improve students' communication skills in working with people with dementia (Jefferson et al., 2012).

Educational Content and Teaching and Learning Methods

The interventions ranged in content, duration and organization of sessions. Two interventions were short duration or stand alone and did not involve practice based learning. Paquette et al. (2010) described a simulation based session with a role player where students assessed, interacted and reflected on the process. In preparation, students were given reading material on delirium, depression and dementia. Jonas-Simpson et al. (2012) developed a research based drama, and students (and healthcare professionals) attended a performance and contributed to reflective focus groups before and after the performance to explore images and understandings about dementia and dementia care.

Three studies described immersion in practice environments as the learning experience without any formal learning about dementia (Ross, 2012; Kaf et al., 2011; Robinson and Cubit, 2007). They varied from an 8-hour experience in a dementia specific day center (Ross, 2012) to 15 hour-long visits (Kaf et al., 2011) and a three week placement (Robinson and Cubit, 2007). In each of these studies, students

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