



Newly qualified children's nurses experiences of supporting postnatal women within Scottish neonatal units

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Breastfeeding;
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Abstract *Aims and objectives:* To gather rich descriptions of the lived experiences of child branch nurses working in neonatal units.

Background: Child branch nursing graduates are replacing midwives within the neonatal nursing workforce and will be the dominant professional in the near future. However this professional group spends little time during their pre-registration education learning about the complexities of pregnancy, breastfeeding and postnatal care.

Design: A qualitative, descriptive phenomenological pilot study.

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Methods: Three newly qualified child branch nurses working within neonatal units were interviewed. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with data analysis undertaken using a recognized staged process.

Results and conclusions: Common themes included the important role midwives play within neonatal care and how they felt poorly prepared educationally for their role with regard to supporting breastfeeding and understanding the impact pregnancy complications may have on the newborn.

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Introduction

With fiscal and professional limitations, nursing care provision within neonatology is shifting. Where neonatal units were once predominantly staffed by registered midwives, expert professionals within maternal and child health, this balance of staffing is moving toward a generic nursing workforce. Registered nurses, particularly child branch graduates, are now the future workforce for neonatal care within Scotland (Scottish Government, 2009). However this professional group spends little time during their pre-registration education learning about the complexities of childbirth or the very specific health needs of the newborn and their family. This gap in educational content could have a detrimental effect on clinical ability.

The philosophy of children's nursing education, as directed by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC, 2010), emphasizes the importance that children's nurses understand the complexities of family relationships, empowerment of children, advocacy, child protection and multidisciplinary working. It provides no direct requirement for neonatal education, with the focus of physiology knowledge spanning infancy to young adulthood only (NMC, 2010). It is within this immediate post qualification period, before further specialist training, that these professionals are expected to support new mothers and their babies. This is a critical time where the support that is provided within a neonatal unit can have far reaching implications for a family and as such is worthy of exploration.

However, there is a requirement by the Department of Health (DOH) that all health professionals who encounter breastfeeding women must have the appropriate knowledge and skills to support and promote the practice of breastfeeding (DOH, 2004). This was explored by Narramore (2007) who strongly suggested that breastfeeding must be incorporated within children's nursing courses. The rationale was that neonates and young babies will often be admitted to children's wards breastfeeding and needing continuing support. This is an environment

where midwives, traditionally relied upon for this role, cannot routinely assist. McLaughlin et al. (2011) investigated children's nurses' knowledge about breastfeeding and noted that although the majority of nurses surveyed displayed positive attitudes to breastfeeding they possessed only a general knowledge in relation to lactation support and problem solving techniques. Dykes (2006) in her review of the education of health practitioners supporting breastfeeding women recommends that undergraduate programmes supported by mentorship schemes to integrate clinical skills and knowledge about breastfeeding are essential, and warns that the challenge for educators is significant but necessary to meet the needs of breastfeeding women and their babies.

The study

Aim

This pilot study aimed to assess the feasibility of gathering descriptions of the lived experiences of new children's nursing graduates, exploring their perceptions of how prepared they felt for their role as a neonatal nurse supporting postnatal women to care for their baby.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive phenomenological approach. Husserl's philosophical endeavour to understand human experience and derive a rich description of that "lived" experience (Pringle et al., 2011) provides an appropriate foundation for this project. Prior to recruitment, University of the West of Scotland ethics committee and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde R&D approval was sought and granted. The study population comprised 10 newly qualified child branch nurses recently recruited to neonatal nursing posts within 4 neonatal wards. Inclusion criteria included single registration child branch nurse with less than 12 months post qualifying

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