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## Original Article

# Application of nursing core competency standard education in the training of nursing undergraduates

Fang-qin Wu, Yan-ling Wang, Ying Wu<sup>\*</sup>, Ming Guo

School of Nursing, Capital Medical University, Beijing, China

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** To evaluate the effectiveness of nursing core competency standard education in undergraduate nursing training.

**Methods:** Forty-two nursing undergraduates from the class of 2007 were recruited as the control group receiving conventional teaching methods, while 31 students from the class of 2008 were recruited as the experimental group receiving nursing core competency standard education. Teaching outcomes were evaluated using comprehensive theoretical knowledge examination and objective structured clinical examination.

**Results:** The performance in the health information collection, physical assessment, scenario simulation and communication in the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusions:** Nursing core competency standard education is helpful for the training of nursing students' core competencies.

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## 1. Introduction

The trend of health care, including nursing, has been trending toward a more patient-centric, integrated platform in China. This includes transformation of the medical model, the renewal of the conception of health, the increasing incidence of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, new innovations in the health care system and a rapidly aging population. These changes accentuate the contradiction between limited teaching time and unlimited teaching content in the traditional nursing education model which simply based on

imparting knowledge and skills [1]. An important subject for nursing educators in the national and abroad is how to close the gap between this limited teaching time and unlimited content to train high quality nurses that are ready to adapt to the rapidly changing health care system. Competency-based education is a concept and educational model that is consistent with the idea and guidelines of reforming our vocational education and higher education issued by State Council and Ministry of Education [2]. del Bueno [3] first proposed the idea of nursing competency-based education. Lenburg [4] established competency outcomes and performance assessment model in 1999. Nursing core competencies include

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [helenywu@vip.163.com](mailto:helenywu@vip.163.com) (Y. Wu).

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assessment and intervention, communication, critical thinking, teaching, human caring relationships, management, leadership, and knowledge integration skill were identified. Nursing core competency standard education is a holistic nursing education idea incorporating these competencies while imparting knowledge, cultivating ability and improving quality [5]. School of nursing, Capital Medical University in China has been reforming of nursing teaching model by successfully incorporating this competency based training model for undergraduate nursing students since 2005.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Subjects

Forty-two five-year nursing undergraduates from the class of 2007 were recruited as the control group receiving conventional teaching methods, while 31 students from the class of 2008 were recruited as the experimental group receiving nursing core competency education.

### 2.2. Teaching methods

#### 2.2.1. Conventional teaching

The conventional teaching method is applied on the control group. Lessons are usually taught by the teacher introducing skills using multimedia courseware and blackboard accompanied by a verbal explanation or lecture. Practical work for students is then assigned, followed by feedback from the teacher.

#### 2.2.2. Core competency teaching

2.2.2.1. *Training objectives.* In the guidance of social demands of modern nurses' ability, to determine the core competency that is necessary for nursing graduates to engage in nursing, and to establish the goal of coordinated development in knowledge, ability, and quality. After they trained, nursing graduates will possess sound theoretical knowledge, skilled clinical nursing skill and good occupation quality, certain degree of nursing teaching ability, nursing research capacity and preliminary community skill and nursing management ability, strong critical thinking, innovation spirit. Core competency teaching attaches more importance to the cultivation of comprehensive ability of practice.

2.2.2.2. *Curriculum changes.* The knowledge system of course in the standard nursing curriculum is quite complete in China. All the clinical nursing courses are established in terms of medical departments in the clinical settings. Every chapter of a specific body function is taught in the logical sequence from general introduction to different diseases with the nursing process integrated into. The course teaching contents are illness-and-clients centered, with great emphasis on treatment and nursing care of disease. While the content related on health and illness quite lack, including the knowledge of psychology, society, culture and environment [6]. To address core nursing competencies, several additions and modifications were made to the standard nursing curriculum based on necessary skills needed by nursing graduates. These changes

are as follows: "Internal Medicine Nursing" and "Surgery Nursing" were integrated into a new course entitled "Adult Nursing"; "Gynecology Nursing" and "Pediatric Nursing" were integrated a new course entitled "Maternal and Perinatal Nursing"; and the clinical portions of "Internal Medicine Nursing", "Surgery Nursing", "Gynecology Nursing" and "Pediatric Nursing" were restructured to be taught as part of clinical teaching and research sections in Xuan wu hospital Capital Medical University. Moreover, several new courses were added including "Care Skills", "Nutrition and Cooking", "Treatment and Nursing Environment", "Intensive Care", "Nursing Communication Skills" and "Specialized Nursing Skills." In this study, the experimental group completed 3699 class hours and 283.5 credits based on the new curriculum, while the control group completed 3492 class hours and 275 credits. In addition to restructuring existing curriculum and adding additional courses, emphasis was placed on communication with early and more contacting patients is implemented uninterruptedly for the duration of the nursing program. The new curriculum cultivated practice ability throughout the whole teaching process, and placed more emphasis on professionalism based on the core competencies. For example, the experimental group communicated with the patients in the hospital and community during "Nursing Introduction" and "Basic Communicating Skills" in year one; collected the data and observed patient condition changes in the ward during year two's "Observation of the disease I", and adapted the three-step teaching model based on "classroom teaching, clinical probation, clinical practice" in year three. This was in contrast to the traditional model where consistent patient contact does not typically occur until years four and five.

2.2.2.3. *Teaching.* The new curriculum adapted many diverse teaching methods to train students' comprehensive, critical thinking, and problem solving abilities. Traditional classroom teaching methods such as problem-based learning (PBL), scenario simulation, case analysis, discussion groups, and role playing were intermixed with new clinical nursing and the humanistic nursing courses. This included weekly scenario simulations tailored to specific disease states following PBL, scenario simulation, and role playing.

2.2.2.4. *Course assessment.* The students' nursing core competency is comprehensively evaluated in a variety of ways. Each course is assessed by the stage evaluation that included student self-evaluation (using the peer rating form in the process), teacher evaluation (using the teacher evaluation form and evaluation in form of questions and homework), and final examination. The major clinical nursing courses and examinations before the graduation were evaluated by using comprehensive theoretical knowledge examination and objective structured clinical examination. These methods evaluate students' ability of assessment and intervention, the comprehensive application ability of knowledge, ability to analyze and solve problems, and some other methods.

### 2.3. Teaching assessment

Comprehensive evaluation before graduation was done by using a nursing comprehensive theoretical knowledge

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