

THE EFFECT OF A SELF-REFLECTION AND INSIGHT PROGRAM ON THE NURSING COMPETENCE OF NURSING STUDENTS: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY



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Nurses have to solve complex problems for their patients and their families, and as such, nursing care capability has become a focus of attention. The aim of this longitudinal study was to develop a self-reflection practice exercise program for nursing students to be used during clinical practice and to evaluate the effects of this program empirically and longitudinally on change in students' clinical competence, self-reflection, stress, and perceived teaching quality. An additional aim was to determine the predictors important to nursing competence.

We sampled 260 nursing students from a total of 377 practicum students to participate in this study. A total of 245 students nurse completed 4 questionnaires, Holistic Nursing Competence Scale, Self-Reflection and Insight Scale, Perceived Stress Scale, and Clinical Teaching Quality Scale, at 2, 4, and 6 months after clinical practice experience. Generalized estimating equation models were used to examine the change in scores on each of the questionnaires. The findings showed that, at 6 months after clinical practice, nursing competence was significantly higher than at 2 and 4 months, was positively related to self-reflection and insight, and was negatively related to practice stress. Nursing students' competence at each time period was positively related to clinical teachers' instructional quality at 4 and 6 months. These results indicate that a clinical practice program with self-reflection learning exercise improves nursing students' clinical competence and that nursing students' self-reflection and perceived practice stress affect their nursing competence. Nursing core competencies are enhanced with a self-reflection program, which helps nursing students to improve self-awareness and decrease stress that may interfere with learning. Further, clinical practice experience, self-reflection and insight, and practice stress are predictors of nursing students' clinical competence. (Index words: Clinical practice; Nursing competence; Self-reflection; Stress) *J Prof Nurs* 31:424–431, 2015. © 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

IN RESPONSE TO clinical care's becoming more complex, the nursing profession faces the enormous challenge of improving nursing competence (NC) and, in particular, of developing core nursing competencies among nursing students. In Taiwan, most nursing

education programs are based on the recommendations of the Taiwan Nursing Accreditation Council, which puts forth eight nursing core competencies: general clinical nursing skills, basic biomedical science, critical thinking, communication and teamwork capability, accountability, life-long learning, ethics, and caring (Hsu & Hsieh, 2009). Of these, critical thinking using self-reflection is crucial in response to the complexity of clinical practice (Chen, 2010). Smith (2012) believes that NC should include two vital aspects. First, nurses must implement their care mission without causing harm to patients. Second, nurses' knowledge and skill activities are evidence of their competence (Smith, 2012). Nursing student's self-confidence in nursing care competence in clinical practice demands not only skillful action and knowledge but also personal reflection on their clinical

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experiences. The ability to reflect, however, is affected by such factors as clinical stress and teaching quality.

Background and Literature Review

Clinical Stress and Clinical Competence

Several studies reported that nursing students experience moderate stress during their clinical practicum (Cheng, Tsai, Chang, & Liou, 2014; Liou, Chang, Tsai, & Cheng, 2013). The most salient stressor was a perceived lack of professional knowledge and skills (Chan, So, & Fong, 2009). This research also has shown that nursing students' levels of stress were inversely related to clinical competence (Cheng et al., 2014; Liou et al., 2013). Hensel and Stoelting-Gettelfinger (2011) noted the need for future research to determine effective ways to teach stress management and to develop a best-design nursing curriculum to reduce stress.

Teaching Quality and Clinical Competence

Teachers' instructional quality also influences nursing students' clinical abilities. Traditional teacher-centered learning leads to students' passively receiving knowledge, which limits students' independence in both learning and creative problem solving. In student-center learning, in contrast, students are encouraged to critically reflect a process that enables them to challenge their feelings, values, and actions (Schaefer & Zygmunt, 2003). Student-centered learning also helps nursing students to make decisions on how to respond when they encounter problems in clinical practice. Through critical reflection, nursing students can review their practical experience, behavior, and decisions and then, as needed, correct errors (Schaefer & Zygmunt, 2003). One study showed that teaching strategies, such as asking students to keep a clinical caring journal, guide students' caring behavior toward patients, enable critical caring capacity, and establish self-confidence (Kuo, Turton, Cheng, & Lee-Hsieh, 2011). Nursing students with higher self-confidence are able to improve their clinical competence, provide patients' safe care, and develop their professional identity as nurses (Brown et al., 2003).

Self-Reflection and Insight, and Clinical Practice

The capacity for self-reflection and insight makes nurses more aware of their patients' needs and how to provide the most appropriate care. Research has indicated that emotional intelligence, e.g., self-awareness, is positively related to nursing performance (Beauvais, Brady, O'Shea, & Griffin, 2011; Fernandez, Salamonson, & Griffiths, 2012) and can improve patient outcome (Akerjordet & Severinsson, 2007).

Elliott et al. (1994) described insight as an individual's experience of a novel feeling or having a sense of discovery. Frank and Frank (1991) view insight as a reprocessing of experience that enables an individual to discover new information. Reid and Finesinger (1952) stated that insight comprises not only self-awareness but also involvement and accountability, which enable action. Thus, insight occurs before action. Rogers

(1942) described insight as accumulating gradually. Nursing students need to cultivate their insight to become competent practitioners.

Self-Reflection, Stress, and Clinical Competence

Self-reflection is a foundation upon which nurses can both demonstrate and evaluate their performance (Way, 2002). Epp (2008) believes that students can take an integrated approach to facing challenges through self-reflection about their thinking, feelings, and actions. Such a process can lead to behavior change and promote problem-solving and professional awareness (Harris, 2005). Duffy (2009) and Myers et al. (2010) found that nurses' inability to think critically or holistically contributed to their stress. Thus, self-reflection can help nursing students to increase their self-awareness as a means to better understand and diminish the stress that could obstruct their learning (Ganzer & Zauderer, 2013; Samaie & Farahani, 2011). In addition, Asselin and Fain (2013) found that nurses' self-reflection could be promoted through providing education in reflective practice. As well, Duffy (2009) proposed that guided reflection practice can help students to achieve successful learning outcomes.

The Development of the Clinical Practice Program

The design of the clinical practice program was based on a combination of Freud's (2003) psychoanalytic theory and Corey's (2012) gestalt therapy. Freud's psychoanalytic theory posits that most intelligent action belongs to one's subconscious and cannot be immediately perceived; individuals need to pay attention to their preconsciousness to achieve insight about an experience or event. Corey's gestalt therapy is based on the notion that an individual (self), through the interaction between him or herself and the environment, can then notice the event or experience. Based on these formulations, we developed a clinical practice program with a self-reflection learning exercise. The idea was, through the learning and practice of care, to lead students' learning from subconsciousness to consciousness, thereby enabling students to cultivate the eight core nursing competencies. It also was expected that nursing students' care ability would be promoted through self-reflection learning exercises that help them to identify and express feelings in the clinical setting. The research also shows that a self-reflection exercise program could help educators to understand students' roles in purposeful change.

In sum, research has focused on the relationship between self-reflection, clinical stress, and clinical competence among nursing students and has shown that teaching strategies can promote learners' reflection. Programs to promote reflection, however, still need to be developed. Further, little attention has been paid to the effect of a self-reflection program on the relationships between self-reflection, clinical stress, perceived teaching quality, and clinical competence, particularly in longitudinal research. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to (a) design a self-reflection practice exercise program that guides students in the eight core competencies during

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