

# DOES NURSING ASSISTANT CERTIFICATION INCREASE NURSING STUDENT'S CONFIDENCE LEVEL OF BASIC NURSING CARE WHEN ENTERING A NURSING PROGRAM?

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The purpose of this study was to explore nursing student's confidence level with basic nursing care when entering the nursing program after implementation of required nursing assistant certification for program admission. In addition, the relationship between being employed as a nursing assistant and confidence level with basic nursing care when entering the nursing program was explored. A Likert-scale survey assessing confidence levels of basic nursing care was sent to 156 nursing students admitted to a nursing program prior to their first nursing course. Confidence level with nursing skills, nursing assistant employment, and length of nursing assistant employment were assessed. Students were most confident in hand washing ( $M = 5.87$ ,  $SD = 0.36$ ), gloving and gowning ( $M = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ), making an unoccupied bed ( $M = 5.38$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ), and oral temperature ( $M = 5.30$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ). Students were least confident in the fitting for cane ( $M = 1.74$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) and ambulation with crutches on steps ( $M = 1.81$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ). Nursing assistant employment increased student confidence with basic nursing care. Nursing programs cannot assume that students are prepared in basic nursing care based on a nursing assistant certification. (Index words: Nursing assistant; Certification; Admission; Skills) *J Prof Nurs 30:162–167, 2014. © 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.*

**I**N RECENT YEARS, several nursing schools have been changing prelicensure nursing admission requirements to require potential nursing students to complete nursing assistant certification prior to beginning professional nursing courses. Additional nursing schools are contemplating making this change. There is rationale for this change. First, this change ensures that prelicensure nursing students have evaluated their own comfort level with providing intimate basic care for patients. Second, this change is a way to save curricular time by decreasing the amount of time required for the development of basic nursing skills in preliminary nursing courses. Finally, it

would guarantee that all prelicensure nursing students would enter nursing courses with the same repertoire of basic nursing skills.

Implementation of the nursing assistant certification requirement has been happening at nursing programs with no research supporting this change. Do potential prelicensure nursing students feel more confident to begin the nursing program because of this new requirement? The purpose of this study is to explore the prelicensure nursing student's confidence level with basic nursing care when entering the nursing program after implementation of required nursing assistant certification for program admission. Basic nursing care is defined as skills that can be completed by a nursing assistant and include understanding Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, basic infection control, bathing, bedmaking, safe patient handling, elimination assistance, nutrition and fluids, personal hygiene and grooming, and vital signs.

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## Background

According to Bandura's social learning theory, the likelihood of learning and behavioral change is affected by three factors: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals (Bandura, 1998). Self-efficacy is the primary source of action in this theory. Self-efficacy is defined as "judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Self-efficacy affects one's confidence to learn, one's motivation, and one's power and determination to face obstacles. In theory, by having potential prelicensure nursing students participate in nursing assistant certification, they should have increased self-efficacy related to basic nursing care and patient interactions. They should feel more confident in their choice to pursue nursing as a career. By increasing self-efficacy, an individual increases learning. The individual has more confidence in overcoming obstacles, goal setting, and obtaining goals in nursing school.

One study (McLaughlin, Moutray, & Muldoon, 2007) explored the role of personality and self-efficacy in the retention of nursing students. A longitudinal design was used to follow 384 students in a nursing program. The researchers collected measures on occupational self-efficacy, academic self-efficacy, and personality and examined the relationship among retention and success in the program. Findings supported the idea that greater occupational self-efficacy (confidence in ability to perform job specifics) in nursing students is related to more successful completion of nursing courses. Specifically, basic nursing care and confidence was not addressed in this study, but the idea of occupational self-efficacy may support the idea of self-efficacy increasing overall confidence.

Unfortunately, the confidence level of prelicensure nursing students with basic nursing care when entering a nursing program has not been explored in the literature. In fact, literature related to basic nursing care is difficult to find. One research study (Salmonson & Andrew, 2006) examined the influence of part-time employment on nursing students' academic performance and focused specifically on work related to nursing. In a study of 267 nursing students, more than 78% of students were in paid employment, with 64% of those working in nursing-related jobs. The study examined the number of hours worked and academic scores in a nursing pathophysiology and nursing practice course. Results indicated that nursing-related employment was not beneficial to student academic performance in nursing courses, and the number of hours of part-time employment was negatively associated with academic performance.

Another study (Higgins, 2005) linked a nursing skills course with success in passing the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN). This study examined the relationship of variables in the application process to successful completion of a nursing program and passage of the NCLEX-RN. Data from 213 students related to preadmission test scores,

age, gender, race, English course, biology course, chemistry course, psychology course, and the nursing skills course was examined. A statistically significant relationship was found between one biology course ( $r = .171$ ), the science component of the preadmission test ( $r = .127$ ), and the nursing skills course ( $r = .281$ ) to passing the NCLEX-RN. The higher the grade the student received in the nursing skills course, the more likely they were to pass the NCLEX-RN. This research did not address the confidence of the students with the skills, simply the course grade.

Although some researchers (Higgins, 2005; Salmonson & Andrew, 2006) touch on nursing skills, no research was found that addressed the prelicensure program admission requirements of nursing assistant certification. Data have not been collected about the number of nursing schools that currently require nursing assistant certification. No literature was found related to health care experience as a component of admission that would predict success in undergraduate nursing. Several nursing programs as reported by McNelis et al. (2010) require prior experience and job shadowing as criteria for admission based on the assumption that potential nursing students should explore their profession to see if it will be a good "fit" for them. Only anecdotal accounts are available to support the idea that students need to be exposed to nursing prior to nursing school admission.

The nursing assistant certification requirement for prelicensure program admission has been suggested for students to build confidence with basic nursing care when entering a program. The difficulty is that states vary in requirements for hours of initial training for certified nursing assistants. Federal mandates for nursing assistant certification is a minimum of 75 hours of classroom training and 16 hours of clinical training. State programs vary between 75 and 175 hours of classroom training and 16 to 100 hours of clinical training (Institute of Medicine, 2008). Many nursing programs require the certification and do not require students to work as a nursing assistant. By requiring nursing assistant certification, nursing programs are assuming that students have used their basic nursing skills to a minimal degree and students could have more experience based on the certification program that the student enrolled in.

The purpose of this study was to explore nursing student's confidence level with basic nursing care when entering a nursing program after implementation of a nursing assistant certification for program admission. The variable confidence was selected to reflect the student's perceived self-efficacy related to their nursing assistant certification. This does not suggest competency, which is a very different concept. The variable confidence was also congruent with national data related to training received by certified nursing assistant and their confidence with their training (Sengupta, Harris-Kojetin, & Ejaz, 2010) and seemed to apply to this setting as well. An additional objective examined if being employed as a nursing assistant was related to increased confidence level with basic nursing care when

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