



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Nursing students' perceptions toward the nursing profession from clinical practicum in a baccalaureate nursing program—A qualitative study

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## KEYWORDS

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**Abstract** The purpose of this study was to explore senior nursing students' perceptions toward the nursing profession and their experiences in clinical practicum in Taiwan. This study used semistructured interview guides and unstructured face-to-face dialogue with the participants based on a qualitative method. A purposive sample with a snowball method from a baccalaureate nursing program in Southern Taiwan was used to recruit participants. A total of 30 senior nursing students participated in this study. Data were collected from February to May 2011. The interviews were transcribed *verbatim*, and data were analyzed based on the phenomenological approach of qualitative methodology. Data were categorized into three major themes: in-depth recognition of nursing, recognition of the meaning and value of life, and decision conflicts for being a nurse. The findings of the study not only help nursing educators further understand the educational effects of clinical practicum, but also provide information for managers of medical organizations to recruit and train newly graduated nurses. Copyright © 2013, Kaohsiung Medical University. Published by Elsevier Taiwan LLC. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

The current and growing shortage of nurses is a global issue, and nursing recruitment and retention are internationally

recognized priorities [1]. It was estimated that 25% of nursing students withdrew from the nursing program before qualifying as a nurse in the United Kingdom [2]. In Taiwan, on average there were 7% of baccalaureate nursing students who withdrew annually before qualifying from 2002 to 2006 [3]. The withdrawal rate of nursing students in Taiwan is lower than that in the UK, which may mean that nursing students were willing to study nursing whether or not they have the potential to be nurses in Taiwan.

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Regarding the intent to be a nurse, this was 85% for nursing students in Taiwan [4]. The passing rate of the National Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses among baccalaureate nursing students in Taiwan is high (82.3–87.2%), but only 59% of licensed nurses entered the workplace [5,6], and 32% of new nurses intended to quit during the first 3 months of their job [7]. The average employment rate of baccalaureate nursing students is declining; for instance, the rate was 83.08% in 2002, 87.41% in 2003, 87.32% in 2004, and 83.37% in 2005 [3]. In the United States, the 1<sup>st</sup>-year turnover rates ranged from 30% to 47%, and the turnover rate within 2 years was about 25% [8]. Why are there high turnover rates both in Taiwan and in the United States? The reason may consist in the gap between perceptions and experiences for nursing students and new graduate nurses. Moreover, the discrepancy between clinical experiences of nursing practicum and the actual requirements for healthcare employers may influence the new graduate nurses' readiness to practice and remain in the nursing field [9]. Therefore, efforts aimed at encouraging nursing students to complete their training and retaining newly licensed nurses in their jobs in the healthcare delivery system should receive the utmost attention.

In nursing education, clinical practicum of the baccalaureate nursing program is the bridge by which nursing students become a "real nurse" [10]. The transition from academic knowledge to the clinical practicum is widely recognized as a period of stress, challenges, role adjustment, and reality shock [11]. Clinical practicum constitutes over 50% of nursing professional curricula of the baccalaureate nursing program in Taiwan. Learning from clinical practicum is an important developmental process for nursing students. Clinical practice plays an important role in developing professional attitude, and it helps students achieve clinical competence. In addition, nursing students obtain the skills of patient care, professional communication, and the capabilities of problem-solving, psychomotor skills, and critical thinking. They also improve their socialization and professional role confidence [12,13]. Clinical experiences can help the students attain a gradual sense of belonging to the nursing profession [14,15]. In our nursing program, the teaching strategies in clinical practicum are diverse, including hands-on practice, problem-based learning, concept-mapping, reflective journaling, and role modeling.

The gaps between nursing education and clinical environments of healthcare delivery system may lead the nursing students to choose careers outside nursing [16]. How to motivate nursing students' interest in the nursing profession and to further encourage them to choose nursing as a career after graduation are very important in addressing the nursing shortage. Previous studies in Taiwan reported that perceptions of satisfaction and stress from clinical experiences were the main influences on the nursing students to choose nursing as their career [4,17]. The negative experiences from clinical practicum may cause the nursing students to hesitate about entering nursing work. Therefore, changing the perceptions of clinical experiences and decreasing conflicts and stress from clinical situations are critical to retain the nursing students in the healthcare delivery system. The purpose of this study

was to explore the experiences and perceptions of nursing students in clinical practicum toward the nursing profession. It is expected that the results of this study will provide not only information for nursing educators in order to improve student's satisfaction and encourage them to enter nursing work after graduation, but also for managers of medical organizations in their efforts to recruit and train newly graduated nurses.

## Methods

### Study design and sampling

This study was a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach based on interviews with 30 senior students from a baccalaureate nursing program in southern Taiwan. The baccalaureate nursing program complied with the national guidelines, lasting 4 years. This study used unstructured dialogues to ensure that specific sets of topics were covered by the data collection [18]. This method is used in the phenomenological approach [19,20]. We used a purposive sampling with a snowballing method to recruit participants. Sample enrolment in this study continued until data saturation had been observed. The enrolment criteria included the following: (1) participants were senior nursing students; (2) they had completed all courses of clinical practicum; (3) and they were willing to participate in the study.

### Procedure of data collection

Data were recorded through semistructured guidelines as a starting point, after which the open-ended and unstructured interviews were conducted in a quiet classroom [21]. Each interview lasted for approximately 1–1.5 hours. The interviews commenced with general open-ended questions, and the in-depth interview technique was used in this study. Guideline questions included: "What viewpoints of nursing did you recognize from previous experiences of clinical practicum?" and "What influence of nursing did you recognize from previous experiences of clinical practicum?" The interviews were conducted with supplementary inquiries that explored participants' responses regarding the recognition development of nursing. To guarantee that the original statements were preserved and used in the description of the findings, interviews were taped and transcribed text by the first author.

### Data analysis

The data of this study were analyzed according to Colaizzi's framework [22]. The interview files were transcribed from recordings to text to form the significant statements as the data for analysis in this study. After deliberate reading of the text, the researcher extracted the meanings of perceptions and experiences of nursing students. Formulated meanings were organized into themes by putting the transcripts with similar contents together. The explicit descriptions were provided afterward. During the deduction process, the inspection of the

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