

Review

The influence of theory and practice on perceptions about caring for ill older people – A literature review



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ABSTRACT

The increasing longevity of the world's population implies the requirement for a nursing workforce who are appropriately equipped to care for older people when they are ill. Although attitudes toward this field of nursing appear to be positive amongst nursing students, fewer students choose the care of ill older people as a career upon qualification; the need to assure the future nursing workforce in this field has been acknowledged globally. In view of the ageing of the world population, there is a need to encourage the care of ill older people as a positive career choice (Koh, 2012). Factors both within the practical learning environment and the environment where students receive theoretical instruction, may potentially impact upon nursing students' attitudes towards caring for ill older people and their career intentions. It is against this background that this review was conducted, in order to identify reasons for this prevailing negativity. It is intended that the review will shed light on strategies to improve these perceptions, showing a career in caring for ill older people in a more positive light.

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1. Introduction and background

The global population is ageing rapidly, and people are living longer; by the year 2050, the number of people over the age of 60

will double, reaching two billion (World Health Organisation, 2011). A consequence of increased longevity in the population is the likelihood that someone who is aged 65 and beyond may need access to nursing care in that time; with advancing age comes the prospect of illness (Moyle et al., 2010). This implies the requirement for a nursing workforce who are equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to care for them. An international review by Neville and Dickie (2014) found that nursing students'

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attitudes toward older people were generally positive, suggesting that this was a progressive springboard from which to further develop the curriculum to sustain this position. However, it would appear that despite this positivity, fewer students choose the care of ill older people as a career upon qualification (Bleijenberg et al., 2012; King et al., 2013; Matarese et al., 2010; Swanlund and Kujath, 2012).

Internationally, both theoretical instruction and practical exposure are key features of nurse education programmes. Nurses' education is, therefore, shared between both practical learning environments and higher education institutions. It is of concern, then, that students' interest in pursuing a career in the care of older people appeared to decrease, as their pre-registration education progressed (McCann et al., 2010; Shen and Xiao, 2011; Stevens, 2011).

Where a worsening interest was reported, this seemed to be related, in part, to poor experiences whilst on clinical placement (Royal College of Nursing (2012a); Shen and Xiao, 2011). It has also been suggested that a deficit in educational content related to ill older people was found to impact upon career choice (Deschodt et al., 2009; Skaalvik et al., 2012). Knowledge has been linked to nursing students' career intentions after qualifying, hence, ensuring that they have sufficient knowledge about the care of older people via their pre-registration curriculum is important (de Guzman et al., 2013).

These international studies reflect that these are worldwide concerns. In view of the ageing of the world population, there is a need to encourage the care of ill older people as a positive career choice (Koh, 2012). It appears that factors both within the practical learning environment and the environment where students receive theoretical instruction, have the potential to impact upon nursing students' attitudes towards caring for ill older people and their career intentions. It is against this background that the aims of this review were developed.

1.1. Aims of the review

This review was conducted in order to identify the reasons for this prevailing negativity toward the field as a career, stemming either from theoretical instruction within a higher education institution (such as a university), or from practical experience. It is intended that the review will shed light on strategies that may improve these perceptions, showing a career in caring for ill older people in a more positive light. This is important because the majority of general nurses will care for older people, irrespective of the specialty in which they work.

1.2. Search methodology

To address the aims of the review effectively, both electronic and manual searches of the literature were carried out. Initially, systematic searches of both CINAHL Plus and Medline were conducted; these databases can be searched simultaneously. The search terms were identified after having broadly scanned through the literature obtained when scoping the review, which gave a picture of the

terms most commonly used in this field, and also different ways of expressing similar ideas. For example, some studies refer to student nurses, others to nursing students; both terms describe the same entity. Boolean operators 'or' and 'and' were used to enhance the sensitivity of the search, through combining the search terms, which are listed in Table 1. CINAHL Plus allows the user to select further limits to their search, such as requesting results in the English language only, and limiting results to literature published between 2009 and 2014; both of these limitations were applied.

The electronic search returned 1190 results, in accordance with the specified limitations. The process of reviewing these results revealed 471 duplicate results.

Inclusion criteria were applied, as follows:

1. Must be related to older people in general, and not attitudes toward older people with a named condition;
2. Must be either a research report, survey results, conference proceeding or policy document, and
3. If attitudes are measured, must be predominantly those of registered nurses, or faculty, and/or student nurses, or providers of direct 'hands-on' care.

Upon review of the abstracts, 447 were not relevant, in that they related to aspects other than attitudes, and 37 were not research reports, survey results, conference proceedings or policy documents. This left 235 results, which were obtained for assessment of their eligibility for inclusion, excluding a further 181 papers. After this process, 39 results remained, and the reference lists of each of these were manually searched. This process revealed only a further

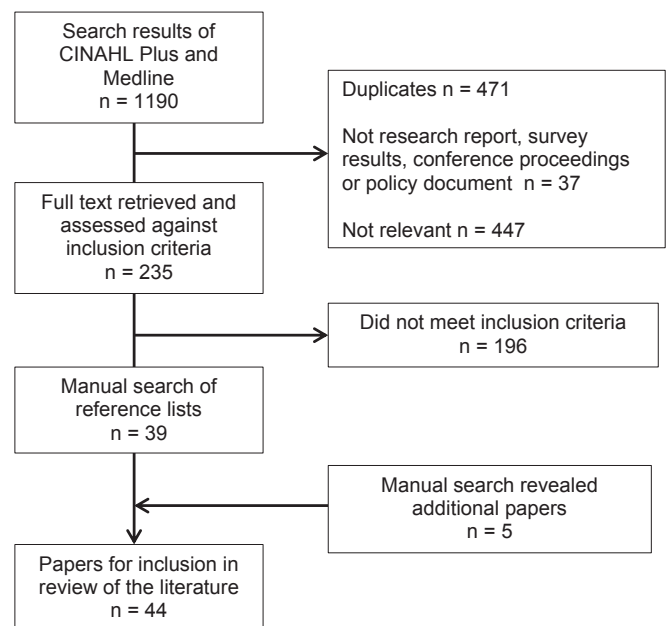


Fig. 1. Flow chart detailing process of literature identification and retrieval.

Table 1
Search terms used within this study.

Key concepts	Search terms
Health professional	Nurs* or student nurse or nursing student or faculty or lecturer AND
Measuring attitudes	Attitud* or measure* or education AND
The older person	Old* or elder* or aged or geriatric*

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