



## Issues for debate

## Building a values-based culture in nurse education

Josie Tetley<sup>a,\*</sup>, Fiona Dobson<sup>b</sup>, Kirsten Jack<sup>a</sup>, Beryl Pearson<sup>b</sup>, Elaine Walker<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> Manchester Metropolitan University, Birley Campus, 53 Bonsall Street, Manchester, M15 6GX, UK<sup>b</sup> The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK

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## ABSTRACT

Nurse education has found itself challenged to select and educate nurses who on completion of their programme have: excellent technical skills, an ability to critically analyse care and work compassionately in ways that support the values of care that are important to service users. Recent reports of care suggest that nursing still needs to develop the values base of its student selection and education processes. Against this backdrop, this paper presents two examples from pre registration nurse education that illustrate how a values based approach is used as part of the selection process in one university and used to inform the development of a reflective poetry initiative in another university.

Having presented the two examples the authors debate some of the wider benefits and challenges linked to these ways of working. For example, the importance of connecting nurses' personal beliefs, attitudes and assumptions to service user values in recruitment are discussed. The use of poetry as a way of thinking about practice that moves beyond traditional models of reflection in nursing are also considered. However, the authors recognise that if developments in nurse education are to have a real impact on nursing practice and patient care, there is the need for values based initiatives to be more directly connected to the delivery of healthcare.

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## Background

Over recent years, there has been a view that nursing is deficient in compassion and has lost sight of the values and principles that should underpin caregiving practices (Rankin, 2013; Straughair, 2012a, 2012b). This is important as the need to focus on values in health care practice is at the heart of the NHS constitution, which identifies that anyone working in a health care context has an obligation to provide care that is underpinned by a commitment to provide: anti discriminatory, respectful, dignified, compassionate and high quality care (Department of Health, 2013). While using a values-based approach to practice may seem unquestionable Fulford et al. (2011) have noted that in reality the values that underpin health care practice are complex and need to take account of the philosophical, evidence-base and practical implications of practice. Moreover, while these values relate to a UK health context, international studies have also identified that understanding and exploring the personal values of nursing students and qualified

nurses can make an important contribution to the development of caring practices (Jiménez-López et al., 2014; Sellman, 2011; Bang et al., 2011).

In terms of addressing these concerns there has been an increased focus on the application of a values-based approach to the selection processes and content of undergraduate nursing programmes, as initial training programmes provide the foundations for future care giving practices (Rankin, 2013). However, nurse education also continues to find itself challenged by the need to select and educate nurses not only on their academic qualifications and ability to critically analyse care, but also on their ability to communicate, work compassionately and deliver values-based person centred care (Fawcett, 2013; Rankin, 2013; Williams and Stickley, 2010). The renewed emphasis on these challenges has led those working in nurse education to explore how a values-based approach to the selection of nursing students and their subsequent education might provide nursing with practitioners who are better prepared to provide person-centred compassionate care (Rankin, 2013).

For nurse education, a values-based approach, that focusses on compassion and dignity in care can promote critical thinking and awareness that goes beyond the acquisition of competence in technical care giving (Commission on Dignity in Care for Older

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 116 247 2529.

E-mail addresses: [j.tetley@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:j.tetley@mmu.ac.uk) (J. Tetley), [fiona.dobson@open.ac.uk](mailto:fiona.dobson@open.ac.uk) (F. Dobson), [k.jack@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:k.jack@mmu.ac.uk) (K. Jack), [beryl.pearson@open.ac.uk](mailto:beryl.pearson@open.ac.uk) (B. Pearson), [elaine.a.walker@open.ac.uk](mailto:elaine.a.walker@open.ac.uk) (E. Walker).

People, 2012; Smith et al., 2010). While there is a need to find ways of ensuring both high quality and person centred care, concerns have been raised about the ability of nurse education to prepare qualified nurses for the reality of delivering compassionate care in real world practice settings (Griffiths et al., 2012; Horsburgh and Ross, 2013). The use of a values-based approach has also been challenged, with questions raised about whose values are important and how these can be used to shape health care education (Griffiths et al., 2012; Rankin, 2013).

Against this backdrop, this debate paper presents two examples of values-based approaches developed by nurse educators in UK universities. The first example illustrates how a values-based approach has been developed and applied as one element of the student selection process by a UK wide distance learning university. The second example demonstrates how a values-based approach has been developed and implemented within an undergraduate pre-registration nursing programme.

### Values-based approach to selection of nursing students

The use of a values based recruitment programme to NHS funded training programmes, which includes nursing is, currently supported by NHS Employers and Health Educations England (NHS Employers, 2014). However, picking up the point made in the background to this paper about whose values are important, The Nursing and Midwifery Council revised its standards for nurse education in 2010 and re-emphasised the importance of engaging service users and carers in the selection of nursing students. Despite this recognition, service user and carer participation in recruitment is variable and as yet seems to be a relatively unexplored aspect of selection, which gives scope for new practices and innovative approaches (Scottish Government Health Directorates and NHS Education Scotland, 2010).

The Open University (OU) has provided part-time pre-registration nurse education across the United Kingdom and the States of Jersey since 2002. Students who study the pre-registration nursing programme with the OU are typically health care support workers, supported by their employers. In 2012 service user participation in the selection of nursing students was enhanced to achieve their more meaningful involvement in this process and at the same time assure fairness in selection. Applicants are required to write a short paper, approximately 250 words, on a values-based topic identified and agreed by a group of service users during the annual review of the university's recruitment and selection processes. In the last two years the subjects have been dignity and empathy and in this current year applicants are asked to write about their understanding of the value "working together for patients". The applicant's paper is submitted electronically to the university along with their personal statement. It is reviewed, commented on and graded by service users within each locality using a standardised grading tool. Service users are not present at the interview so derive an interview question from each applicant's paper. This question is posed by a member of the interview panel during the individual interview process, using the service user's own words or wording agreed with the service user. This enables the involvement of service users who could find it very difficult to participate in face to face interviews due to personal limitations.

Informal feedback from the service users indicates that they appreciate their increased influence on determining the value to be reviewed, assessing the applicants' personal qualities and values in relation to nursing and providing the interview panel with the means of bringing the service user dimension alive during the selection of students. Academic colleagues and practice partners also regard this enhancement as highly effective, which mirrors the findings of Rhodes and Nyawata (2011) who found that both

academics and service users viewed their involvement in the selection of nursing students as positive and a move towards a gold standard in student nurse selection.

### Caring words project

During 2012 a team of nurse academics and creative writing colleagues at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) explored the use of poetry writing to develop a values-based approach to pre-registration nurse education. Using creative teaching and learning strategies encourages students to think more deeply about issues they might prefer to ignore and there are links between creative teaching, critical thinking and deeper levels of learning (Oliver, 2010). Using poetry writing as a means of reflection, encourages students to view the world in different ways (Threlfall, 2013) and remain open to other perspectives, thus reducing the risk of stereotyping behaviour (Furman et al., 2008).

Consideration of these issues led to funding of £5000 from the MMU University Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund to develop creativity in teaching. The underpinning aims of the project were to develop a values based approach to learning by encouraging students to write reflective poems about practice which are then shared in a supportive classroom environment.

Students have the option of posting their poems on a dedicated website and since the launch of [www.caringwords.mmu.ac.uk](http://www.caringwords.mmu.ac.uk), MMU students have written and shared many of their poems thereby developing a creative community. Subjects such as compassion, communication, ageing and 'being a nurse' have been explored using the medium of poetry. All students are expected to write a reflective poem and are asked to contribute to the website. Due to the personal nature of the work, it is not assessed, although there is an expectation that all students will bring their poems to the classroom session, so they have something to contribute.

Feedback from students suggests that they enjoy the freedom of poetry writing as a means of reflecting on their practice. The drafting and re-drafting process of poems encourages students to re-visit and re-think their thoughts and feelings about care they have provided or witnessed. Poetry writing encourages them to make sense of their feelings without the need to fit into a template or reflective model, which might be viewed as restricting rather than encouraging creative thinking. Moreover, considering the poems written by others encourages MMU students to gain insight into how their colleagues are feeling whilst at the same time, learning more about themselves and their values and beliefs about nursing practice.

### Discussion

To those outside nursing it is expected that nurses should be caring and compassionate, however, in reality nurses are striving to deliver safe dignified care in a complex and changing world of health care (Buchanan, 2013). For student nurses, the world they work in is arguably even more complex, with expectations placed on them from their university, personal and practice environments (Curtis et al., 2012). As students engage in programmes of nurse education, their socialisation into this new world can be both positive and negative (Houghton, 2014). Moreover, a grounded theory study identified that student nurses feel uncertain about how they might emotionally connect with patients in the context of professional practice (Curtis, 2014). There is then a need to connect students to their values and beliefs in ways that will enable them to feel more confident about how they can engage with patients in empathetic and therapeutic ways (Costello and Haggart, 2008).

Helping students engage with values from the outset is then important because as they progress through their careers they will

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