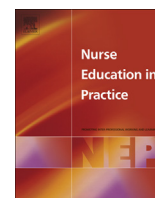


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Clinical nurses' perception of continuing professional education as a tool for quality service delivery in public hospitals Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria



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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the perception of nurses on various aspects of continuing professional education (CPE). A mixed method design (quantitative/qualitative) was adopted. A self-explanatory, semi-structured questionnaire was validated and used to collect data in addition to un-structured interview. One hundred and fifty nurses were selected through stratified random sampling from two hospitals in Calabar, Nigeria and served as participants. Participants generally perceived CPE as valuable and worthwhile and participated because it is mandatory and helps them to retain their jobs. The content of CPE were perceived to be more relevant for clinicians than for nurse educators; clinical skills and quantitative research methodology were adequately covered while evidence-based practice, attitudinal issues, nursing theories and patient safety were inadequately covered. CPE was perceived to be fragmented without gaining points, follow-up monitoring and evaluation after CPE which make it difficult to objectively assess the influence of CPE on quality of care. It is recommended that nurse leaders in Nigeria should develop online CPE modules for nursing, and allocate points to them so that participation may contribute to career progression. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems should be put in place to assess impact of CPE on staff competence and patient outcomes.

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Introduction

Health care is constantly developing, progressing, evolving and advancing as the needs of the population change. Knowledge and techniques in health care are rapidly expanding and even the health care environment is becoming increasingly complex. Health care recipients trust health professionals to continually provide care that is safe, qualitative, efficient, effective, timely and patient-centred. This point is emphasized by the [Health & Care Professions Council HCPC \(2010\)](#) which states that recipients of care trust health professionals to provide care that is safe, efficient, effective, timely, patient-centred, and equitable. Therefore a well-educated nursing workforce with current knowledge and skills is critical to the provision of quality nursing care. Although nursing

education is driven by the need to provide qualitative care to clients and provides content to ensure this, it should be supported by continuing professional education aimed at ensuring the maintenance and improvement of the competencies already acquired. Continuing professional development (CPD) and continuing professional education (CPE) have become popular terms among professional groups as tools for updating knowledge and skills ([Xiao, 2006](#)). Ensuring that professionals attain and maintain their competencies is at the core of continuing professional development (CPD). In nursing continuing professional education (CPE) is very important because it provides professionals with new theories and evidence of what does and does not work in their practice. It also ensures continuous improvement of their performance to deliver the best patient care with the ultimate aim of improving patient outcomes.

In Nigeria nurse education is carried in hospital-based Schools of Nursing for three years (leading to the award of registered nurse RN certificate) and in the Universities for five years, Baccalaureate programme (leading to the award of registered nurse RN and registered midwife RM certificates). After initial licensing, nurses are required to renew their licences every three years during which time they must have attended at least one continuing education programme. These programmes are often organized in large urban

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cities and nurses in rural settings and small towns have to travel far to attend. They have to pay for transport and accommodation for the duration of the programme. Therefore, despite the importance of CPE however, not many nurses/midwives in Nigeria avail themselves of the opportunity to attend such programmes unless they are organized in the health institutions in which they work or is done for free. The Nursing & Midwifery Council of Nigeria has introduced Mandatory Continuing Professional Development programmes (MCPDP) to update and maintain the professional knowledge, skills, abilities, competence of nurses and midwives; ensure clinical governance and enhance the provision of appropriate, relevant, high quality service to clients. To further ensure the mandatory aspect of CPE, the Council has also tied it to the renewal of licence to practise and nurses are expected to attend a minimum of five days learning activity every three years before re-licensure. This is similar to what is done in PREP UK. In Nigeria although the Ministry of Health, Department of Nursing Sciences in universities, the professional association, health institutions and other organizations and Non-Governmental organizations also organize CPE for nurses in an attempt to enhance the quality of practice, such programmes are often in the form of conferences, seminars, workshops, and clinical meetings. However and some of these programmes are not structured, except those organized by the Nursing & Midwifery Council and the West African College of Nursing which are in the form of revision and update courses. These update programmes are not online so nurses have to physically attend the courses. CPE is also known as Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or simply continuing education (CE). Although CPD is a broader concept, for the purpose of this paper, CPE, CPD and CE (continuing education) are used interchangeably.

Although reviewed literature identifies the importance of continuing professional education and professional development for nurses subsequent to initial registration (including enrolled nurses), there is however a lack of empirically based work analysing nurses' perceptions of their continuing professional education needs and the perceived outcomes of continuing professional education (Barriball et al., 1992). The purpose of this paper is therefore to examine nurses' perception of continuing professional education as a tool for quality service delivery in public hospitals in Calabar, Nigeria.

Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine clinical nurses' perception of Continuing Professional Education (CPE) in the following specific areas: the benefits of CPE, who should finance CPE, areas of content for CPE, method of delivery of content/learning methods used, where CPE should be done (within the health institution of practice or away from it); what influences participation in CPE programmes
2. Determine the influence of CPE on quality service delivery in public hospitals in Calabar.

Background and literature

Health care practitioners are required to remain competent by being empowered to provide care that is effective, qualitative and safe (Richards, 2009). Continuing professional education empowers the nurse by creating a sense of self worth and competence that comes from acquiring skills and abilities for practice. Such empowered health care practitioners can perform their jobs more confidently and more effectively (Richards, 2009). Health care professionals have always been encouraged to continue to learn in order to update their knowledge and maintain clinical competence (Gristi and Jacono, 2006). Reviewed literature (Hager et al., 2007;

Institute of Medicine (IOM), 2003) identifies the importance of continuing professional education and professional development for nurses subsequent to initial registration. Continuing professional education keeps individuals current on trends, skills and techniques required for effective practice. Nurses' roles can be extended through continuing professional development which is also considered to be a key factor in nursing retention Gould et al. (2007). In Nigeria however, participation at continuing education programmes does not seem to count considerably for staff promotion and retention. This is because employers and management responsible for appraisals for promotion simply look at the currency of practising licence and may not necessarily ask how many, if any, continuing professional education programmes had been attended during the period.

Although literature reports the importance of continuing professional education (CPE), not many of them report empirical studies on the perception of nurses towards continuing professional education and the perceived outcomes of continuing professional education in relation to quality service delivery. According to Wikipedia, Continuing Professional Education (CPE) consists of any educational activity undertaken after formal training with the aim of helping to maintain, develop or increase knowledge, problem-solving, technical skills or professional performance standards so that the professional can provide better service. The Health & Care Professions Council HCPC (2010) defines it as a range of learning activities through which health and care professionals maintain and develop throughout their career to ensure that they retain their capacity to practice safely, effectively and legally within their evolving scope of practice. Such programmes should be purposeful, patient-centred (for clinicians) or student-centred (for educators) and tailored to learning needs of individual practitioners.

Continuing Professional Education is a systematic way professionals continue to learn and develop throughout their careers in order to keep their skills and knowledge up to date thereby maintaining and enhancing their professional competencies. It is therefore a means to an end and should involve monitoring and feedback to determine the impact of such programmes on the quality of practice and patient outcomes. Researchers (Rodriguez et al., 2010) have however opined that there has been limited focus on evaluation of continuing education (CPE) in general and continuing medical education (CME) in particular in different professional specialties in the health professions in terms of the impact on patient outcomes. Since CPE is supposed to maintain, improve, and broaden knowledge and skills throughout one's professional life it should therefore be monitored and feedback on practice and behaviour provided. Only then would it promote effective practice, sustain quality of work and ensure the development of personal and professional qualities necessary for progression through one's professional career. CPE programmes should be accessible, interactive and learner-driven. However in Nigeria, as in many developing nations, the modes of CPE available do not achieve these requirements (John, 2008) such programmes in Nigeria are mostly in the form of on-the-job training, refresher courses and formal organized programmes like conferences, workshops and seminars. Web-based modules and self-directed learning modes are yet to be developed in the country for continuing education (CE) in nursing.

Methods

A mixed method design was adopted for the study using semi-structured questionnaire which gathered quantitative data and unstructured interview which gathered qualitative data. The questionnaire was self-explanatory, researcher-developed and had

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