



Self-assessment of clinical nurse mentors as dimensions of professional development and the capability of developing ethical values at nursing students: A correlational research study

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SUMMARY

Introduction: Providing adequate training for mentors, fostering a positive mentorship culture and establishing the necessary operational procedures for ensuring mentorship quality are the keys to effective clinical mentoring of nursing students.

Purpose: The purpose of the research was to explain different dimensions of clinical mentors' professional development and their capability of developing ethical values in nursing students.

Methods: A non-experimental quantitative research design was employed. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire administered to the population of clinical mentors (N = 143). The total number of questions was 36. Descriptive statistics were used, and bivariate analysis, factor analysis, correlation analysis and linear regression analysis were performed.

Results: The professional development of clinical nurse mentors was explained ($R^2 = 0.256$) by career advancement ($p = 0.000$), research and learning ($p = 0.024$) and having a career development plan ($p = 0.043$). Increased professional self-confidence ($R^2 = 0.188$) was explained by career advancement ($p = 0.000$) and the time engaged in record keeping ($p = 0.028$). Responsibility for the development of ethical values in nursing students ($R^2 = 0.145$) was explained by the respondents' level of education ($p = 0.020$) and research and learning ($p = 0.024$). Applying ethical principles and norms into practice ($R^2 = 0.212$) was explained by self-assessed knowledge in ethics ($p = 0.037$) and research and learning ($p = 0.044$).

Conclusions: Clinical nurse mentors tended to lack a career development plan, had low work time spent on research and insufficiently participated in education and training activities, which turned out to be significant explanatory factors of their professional development and their capability of developing ethical values in nursing students. The research showed that nursing and higher education managers often failed to assume responsibility for the professional development of clinical nurse mentors.

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Introduction

The implementation of clinical mentoring is essential to student nurses' learning. This relates not only to their development of practical skills but also to their development of professionalism, which incorporates interactive skills and ethical competence. Hegenbarth et al. (2015) cite that clinical training consolidates the students' knowledge and socialized them into the profession.

Opportunities for ongoing professional development of clinical nurse mentors are frequently occurring comments throughout the literature (Jokelainen et al., 2011a; Waldo, 2010; Cangelosi et al., 2009; Johnston and Mohide, 2009; Baldwin et al., 2014). Providing adequate

training for mentors, fostering a positive mentorship culture and establishing the necessary operational procedures for ensuring mentorship quality are the keys to effective clinical mentoring of nursing students. Baldwin et al. (2014) summarized that there is a wide agreement that nursing students view clinicians as influential role models for their practice and that there is a need for consistent continuing professional development for clinicians who assume this role in order to ensure quality experiences for students.

Background/Literature

Providing clinical mentoring for students is part of nursing professionalism, which, in turn, reflects how nurses view their work and serves as an important indicator for ensuring patient safety and high quality care. Professionalism and the formation of a positive

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professional identity constitute the key elements influencing the development of future nursing graduates (Shakespeare and Webb, 2008).

Anderson (2011) suggests that good clinical nurse mentors encourage students to gain knowledge and clinical experience, treat them as individuals, recognize different learning stages, demonstrate practical nursing interventions and involve students in professional clinical teams. A literature review by Wilkes (2006) found that for students, mentors represent an inspiration and are role models who not only take care of patient needs, but also student needs. Bailey and Tuohy (2009) emphasize that, for the learning process to be successful, students need support from teachers, relevant skills, prior experimental learning and required theoretical knowledge, among other things.

From a systematic review, Jokelainen et al. (2011a) sought a unified description of student mentoring. Their review identified characteristics of clinical mentoring such as creating a supporting learning environment, enabling students' individual learning processes, strengthening students' professionalism, helping them develop their professional identities and improving nursing students' professional competence. Both professionalism and the formation of a positive professional identity constitute the key elements influencing the development of future nursing graduates.

An essential element of the knowledge and skills nursing students must acquire is the development of competencies in moral and ethical decision-making in a clinical setting. The relationships and interactions between students and their educators have the potential to influence the development of students' ethical values. From a study based on findings from 19 focus groups, Doane (2002) states that health providers are responsible for supporting and encouraging nurses to make ethical decisions, thereby developing their professional identity, self-concept and self-esteem as moral decision makers. Research by Elpern et al. (2005) and Lützén et al. (2010) revealed that nurses experienced moral distress when they could not take a course of action they believed to be best for the patient, or, generally speaking, when their ability to influence the moral and ethical decision-making in a clinical setting was insufficient or extremely restricted, which in turn impacted on their personal and professional self-perceptions. This suggests that student nurses need support in developing strategies to contend with such situations. Nolan and Markert (2002) recognized in their longitudinal study that students did not consider their clinical experience to have been especially significant in their growing ethical understanding. Discussing the revision of a "Code of Ethics for nurse educators", Rosenkoetter and Milstead (2010) have argued that the role of educators (instructors, clinical mentors) is crucial, as they represent not only role models for students, but also a source of reliable information and encouragement to critically evaluate their own ethical decisions and the ethical decision-making of those they work with throughout their nursing practice.

Results of a phenomenographic study conducted with British and Finnish mentors by Jokelainen et al. (2011b) suggested that effective student mentoring in the clinical setting can only be ensured by providing adequate training for mentors, fostering a positive mentorship culture and establishing the necessary operational procedures for ensuring mentorship quality. Hutchings et al. (2005) suggest that mentors require more support from educators who should be more frequently in contact with clinical settings, and Jokelainen et al. (2011b) find that mentors need to reserve more time for mentoring students. According to Waldo (2010), in a literature-based discussion piece, one of the most common concerns reported by clinical nurses engaged in student supervision is the lack of support at different levels, ranging from nursing school leaders and health provider managers, to colleagues in the clinical setting. A literature review by Lu et al. (2005) found that supervisory support was correlated with nurses' job satisfaction. If nurses have a higher commitment to their profession, they are more satisfied with their job (Hampton and Hampton, 2004).

In a systematic review of 23 research articles that focused on the term 'mentoring', Jokelainen et al. (2011a) found that decisive factors

in ensuring effective mentoring programs for nursing students include the characteristics and management of health care organizations, as these play a crucial role in ensuring the necessary resources and systematic training for mentors. Findings of a study carried out by Çelik and Hisar (2012), among 531 nurses working at a range of hospitals in Turkey, suggest that nursing educators and managers must encourage nurses to participate in education and training programs, while also developing various programs designed to expand nurses' access to education.

Other studies (e.g. Huybrecht et al., 2011) have stressed the importance of training opportunities for clinical mentors working with nursing students. Continuing education, or continuing professional development (CPD), is extremely important for increasing the level of professionalism.

Goal of Research

The goal of the research was to explain different dimensions of clinical mentors' professional development and their capability of developing ethical values in nursing students.

Methods

A non-experimental quantitative research design was employed.

Description of Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used for the survey. The survey was conducted as part of a FHCJ development project (Skela-Savič et al., 2011). Variables were designed based on a review of research by various authors in professional ethics and CPD (Paulsen, 2011; Erdil and Korkmaz, 2009; Hunink et al., 2009; Hallin and Danielson, 2008; Bjorkstrom et al., 2008; Rassin, 2008). The questionnaire included demographic items (4 closed-ended questions), items related to the respondents' level of education, professional development, working time spent for different tasks (communication, documentation, research, clinical mentoring and health education) and knowledge of ethics (17 closed-ended questions). The final part of the questionnaire consisted of two content-related sets of questions: dimensions of professional development (6 closed-ended questions, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.780$) and the development of ethical values in nursing students (9 closed-ended questions, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.828$). Respondents were asked to indicate, on a 5-point Likert scale, their level of agreement with two content-related sets of questions, ranging from the lowest (1) to the highest (5) level of agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The total number of questions was 36.

Data Collection and Processing

The study was conducted between June and September 2012 and adheres to the principles set forth in the Declaration of Helsinki. Prior permission was obtained for the distribution of questionnaires from all participating health care institutions and from the Committee for Scientific Research at the Faculty of Health Care Jesenice. Data collection was anonymous; respondents were free to decline participation. The person responsible for each particular clinical learning center distributed the questionnaires among the departments and units. Respondents were given 10 days to return completed questionnaires to the agreed place.

The obtained data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS 18.0. Internal consistency for the total set results was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Basic descriptive analysis, a chi-square test, correlation analysis (Pearson's correlation coefficient), Principal Axis Factor Analysis, Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, and linear regression were performed. In conducting the Factor Analysis, recommendations

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