



Review

Role modeling in undergraduate nursing education: An integrative literature review



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SUMMARY

The transition of nursing education from the hospital setting to the university sector over recent decades has opened dialog about who is guiding the development of nursing students' professional identity. In addition, there is ongoing debate over real or perceived gaps between nursing student learning in the university and the clinical area, how this translates into professional behaviors and how well students make the transition between the two settings. This paper presents the findings of an integrative literature review into the topic of role modeling in undergraduate nursing education.

This review was conducted to identify and appraise research findings about role modeling of professional behaviors for undergraduate nursing students. Literature reviewed from 2000 onwards assesses what is currently known about role modeling of undergraduate nursing students. A systematic search of the databases of CINAHL, Scopus and PubMed from 2000 onwards resulted in the selection of 33 articles for deeper analysis.

Two clear themes emerged from the literature, the first relating to nurse clinicians as role models for students during clinical placements and the second relating to nurse academics as role models in the academic setting. Findings from this integrative literature review show an imbalance in the recognition of the role modeling of professional behaviors in the clinical versus the academic setting. Nurses in academic settings have more contact with the students over their period of study and as such, the significance of nurse academics as student role models requires further investigation.

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Introduction

Role modeling has a number of definitions and interpretations in the literature, but it is widely accepted that it refers to the observation of behaviors or attitudes of someone that one admires and the subsequent adopting of those behaviors or attitudes for oneself (Cruess et al., 2008). Role modeling in health is represented in the literature, predominantly in relation to health professionals' role modeling healthy behaviors for the community (Blake et al., 2011; Yancey et al., 2011). However, health professionals' role modeling for students receives sporadic attention. Role modeling by experienced practitioners for students in medical education is the subject of frequent discussion (Alpert, 2011; Byszewski et al., 2012; Cruess et al., 2008; Curry et al., 2011; Kenny et al., 2003); role modeling in other health disciplines, including rehabilitation sciences is not so common (Hobson and Walmsley, 2006). Comparatively, role modeling in nursing education has been the subject of limited previous research.

Current trends in nursing education to produce work-ready graduates include adopting a range of innovative teaching and learning

strategies to integrate all ways of learning nursing knowledge into curricula design (Baldwin et al., in press; Benner et al., 2009). Developing an understanding of covert teaching practices such as role modeling will allow for their inclusion in formal curricula that incorporates multiple ways of student learning.

Background/literature

Aim

This review was conducted to identify and appraise research findings about role modeling of professional behaviors for undergraduate nursing students. Specifically this paper will identify who the role models are for undergraduate nursing students and in what setting the role modeling occurs for undergraduate nursing students.

Method

A systematic literature search was conducted using the following key terms: role model*, nurs*, educat*, and student to search the CINAHL, ProQuest and Scopus databases. The search was date limited

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from 1999 to 8th December 2012 and included peer-reviewed journal articles, IN PRESS articles, and those published in English. The following table lists the results from each of these searches (see Table 1). The initial literature search strategy was re-run in July 2013 to ensure that there were no recent additions to the literature that had been missed. This resulted in the inclusion of a new paper presenting the results of research into role modeling published in July 2013.

Results

Search results were combined and duplicates removed. Abstracts of the 714 articles identified in the searches were downloaded and read to assess their relevance to the aim of this integrative literature review. Of these 714 abstracts, 116 articles were retained and the full text of each was downloaded for further reading. Of these 116 papers, 84 were discarded as not relevant to the question posed, leaving a final thirty-two articles for review. The inclusion of the 2013 published paper by Nouri et al. (2013) results in a total of thirty-three articles for review. Each of the final 33 papers was analyzed for content, rigor, reliability and relevance to the research. As a recognized framework for evaluation of published research, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) tools were used as criteria for this purpose. CASP questions were utilized to promote an objective, consistent analysis of the research findings reported in the included articles (CASP, 2010). The choice of the specific CASP instrument used was based on the research methods in the paper under review. That is, the qualitative tool was used for qualitative research and the cohort tool was used for quantitative research. Papers reporting mixed methods research were all presented in two parts; the qualitative component in one paper and the quantitative component in another, thus, the relevant tool was used to review each paper as an independent publication. The standard template from CASP (CASP, 2010) using 10 questions to assess qualitative articles and 12 questions to assess quantitative articles was employed. Using the CASP instruments facilitated a systematic appraisal of the trustworthiness of the current research as it pertains to the research question. Table 2 contains the final set of papers analyzed in this literature review according to theme. Key issues from the CASP analysis are also identified in the *Summary of findings* column.

Literature Review

The articles in this review relate the findings of research studies that utilized a range of research methods, of which 27 were qualitative studies and four were quantitative. Three of the articles were reporting the qualitative findings of a mixed method research design. These sample sizes varied in number from as few as four participants to a maximum number of 320 in the qualitative studies and from 10 to 1903 for the quantitative studies. Further, the specificity of the research question being asked will also impact on the sample size from which to gather the data, although this may impact on the transferability of findings in some cases.

Results

The literature was read and reread several times in the process of analysis. Of the 33 papers included the large majority ($n = 26$) discuss research findings related to role modeling during clinical placement. Comparatively, only seven articles report findings related to role modeling in the academic setting. The two themes identified in this integrative literature review therefore are:

1. Nurse clinicians as role models in the professional development of nursing students during clinical placement
2. Nurse academics as role models in the professional development of nursing students.

Theme 1: Nurse Clinicians as Role Models in the Professional Development of Nursing Students

Twenty-six out of 33 publications relate to nursing students' experiences in a clinical setting, in particular relating to compulsory clinical placement experience undertaken during their course of study. Of these papers, two manuscripts report findings from research with nurses working in the clinical setting, including facilitators, mentors and preceptors; twenty report the experiences of nursing students; and four report findings from research with both clinicians and students. Overall each of the articles analyzed reflects students having positive experiences in clinical areas. However within this, students report that feelings of inclusion and valuing of their knowledge and skills impact on how they responded to their clinical placements and in turn how well they achieved the associated learning outcomes. Both students and nurses in clinical areas report the important role that experienced clinicians play in the professional development of students.

Two of the papers included were literature reviews (Allan et al., 2008; Dorsey and Baker, 2004) and one paper presents the findings of a meta-synthesis of the current literature about the development of nursing students' perceptions of patients as human beings (Rudolfsson and Berggren, 2012).

A strong element of this theme is how students adopt the behaviors of clinician role models they work with to varying degrees. However, some of the articles pay particular attention to the student experience of being exposed to both good and bad role models (Perry, 2009) and students' intuitive choice to emulate those they perceive to be "good nurses" (Donaldson and Carter, 2005; Ferguson, 2011; Grealish and Ranse, 2009). Other authors also discuss how students "pick and choose" which professional traits they adopt (Gray and Smith, 2000; Hanson, 2013; Levett-Jones et al., 2007). Students report adopting traits that they perceive value good clinical practice, are centered around the patient or recipient of care, show respect for, and receive respect from colleagues, and those professional behaviors that demonstrate that a nurse wants to be a part of providing care to a patient. Even a bad role model can have a positive impact on the student in that they recognize the type of nurse they do not want to be (Grealish and Ranse, 2009). The characteristics of good and bad role models include reference to how experienced clinicians include and respect the student, how they

Table 1
Search terms.

Database	Search terms	Limitations	Results
Scopus	Role model* AND nurs* AND educat* AND student	Publication years 1999–2012 Limit to English;	555
CINAHL	Role model* AND nurs* AND educat* AND student	Journal articles including IN PRESS Publication years 1999–2012 Limit to English;	8
PubMed	Role model* AND nurs* AND educat* AND student	Journal articles including IN PRESS Publication years 1999–2012 Limit to English; Journal articles including IN PRESS	151

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