



Evaluation of a PBL strategy in clinical supervision of nursing students: Patient-centred training in student-dedicated treatment rooms

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SUMMARY

Aim: The present study aimed at investigating staff members' and nursing students' perception of and satisfaction with an intervention involving patient-centred training in student-dedicated treatment rooms during clinical supervision.

Background: It is well known that clinical education is important and that the clinical learning environment influences the development of nursing students' ability to solve clinical problems. In the present study, an intervention using a problem-based learning (PBL) strategy was introduced and evaluated in clinical education. The PBL strategy is called 'Patient-centred training in student-dedicated treatment rooms'.

Design and methods: Descriptive; both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. A questionnaire and focus group interviews were used.

Result: Most participants found the PBL strategy to be highly satisfactory, both for staff and for students. The students seemed to feel that their time in clinical education had been used efficiently.

Conclusion: Integration of theory and practice during clinical training has been emphasized as a necessary component, and the new strategy, which involves a method of promoting students' reflection, represents one way of facilitating such integration, in that it may bridge the gap between theory and practice. More extensive and more specific research is need in the future.

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Background

There are nursing education programmes all over the world, and the prerequisites for such training can vary across countries. Some kind of clinical training is always included, though it can be organized in different ways. It is important that clinical training be organized in such a way that students have opportunities to use their theoretical knowledge in practice. The present paper reports the results of a pilot study that evaluated opinions about an approach called the 'PBL strategy', which extends PBL into clinical supervision. This model could be of interest to lecturers from different cultures.

Review of the literature

The clinical learning environment influences the development of nursing students' knowledge and their ability to solve clinical problems (McRobbie and Fraser, 1993; Grahn, 1987; Hart and Ro-

tem, 1994; Dunn and Hansford, 1997; Nolan, 1998; Chan, 2002; Ranse and Grealish, 2007). Registered nurses (RNs) who serve as supervisors in the clinical setting play an important role (Severinson and Rahm Hallberg, 1996). The relationship between nursing students and RNs influences nursing students' learning during their clinical training (Löfmark and Wikblad, 2001; Vallant and Neville, 2006). Time in clinical setting is often not used efficiently (Ashworth and Morrison, 1989; Polifroni et al., 1995; Nolan, 1998).

Pilhammar-Andersson (1997) and Jerlock et al. (2003) showed that clinical training is often structured and organized on the basis of an apprentice perspective, rather than as an academic education programme, and that it is seldom based on pedagogical considerations. Andrews et al. (2005) emphasized that it is often problematic when clinical training is combined with an academic attitude, which should be based on critical thinking. That is because nursing students should not 'learn the job' from a model during their clinical practice, they should turn their theoretical knowledge into practice and also develop their independence and professional attitude.

Cope et al. (2000) stated that one requirement for learning during clinical training is that the supervisor gradually play down his/her role, stepping back and letting the student develop his/her

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knowledge and competence. Botti and Reeve (2003) emphasized that it is important to gradually increase the complexity of clinical cases and to encourage students' critical thinking by 'thinking aloud' and through systematic questioning.

Many have emphasized the value of reflection for students during clinical training, and it has been shown that developing students' critical thinking ability results in better learning (Platzer et al., 2000; Liimatainen et al., 2001; Channell, 2002; Landmark et al., 2003; Lindgren et al., 2005; Turner and Beddoes 2006). Because reflection is a complex process, it is best to use a structured model for reflection during clinical training (Ruland and Ahern, 2007). Even in nursing practice, it has been emphasized that reflection is important (Driscoll and Teh, 2001; Ekebergh, 2001; Fornies and Mc Alpines, 2007; McBrien, 2007; Gustafsson, 2004; Gustafsson et al., 2007; Mantzoukos and Jasper, 2004).

In nursing practice, nurses continually make decisions about patients' health and response to illness, but little is known about how nursing students' decision-making skills can be facilitated (Angel et al., 2000; Girot, 2000). The theory–practice gap has been discussed in relation to nursing education and practice. Severinson (1998) and Landmark et al. (2003) argued that if students had the opportunity to reflect often on their practical training, then this gap would decrease.

In the nursing literature, there is consensus on the notion that reflection improves the student's ability to integrate theory and practice and contributes to professional development.

Problem-based learning (PBL)

Problem-based learning (PBL) is a student-centred instructional strategy in which students collaboratively solve problems and reflect on their experiences. Characteristics of PBL are:

- Learning is driven by challenging, open-ended problems.
- Students work in small collaborative groups.
- Teachers take on the role as 'facilitators' of learning.

Advocates of PBL claim that it can be used to enhance content knowledge and foster the development of communication, problem-solving, and self-directed learning skills. The role of the lecturer and clinical supervisor is to guide the learning process rather than to provide knowledge (Wikipedia, 2008). Thus, in PBL, the emphasis is on students taking an active part in the acquisition of knowledge (Hård af Segerstad et al. 1996). The value of PBL in clinical nursing education was described by Ehrenberg and Häggblom (2007).

Nursing education in Sweden

Swedish nursing education has changed considerably over the past 20 years. It became an academic programme in 1998, and is now a three-year, fulltime programme. Swedish National Agency for Higher Education has issued directives regulating nursing education (SFS 1992:1434, SFS 2006:1053). Pedagogical developments in education have been made, but most have been theoretical (Ehrenberg and Häggblom, 2007). Traditionally, clinical education has had an apprentice perspective, and supervision has been based on learning-by-doing. Most RNs who serve as clinical supervisors have a more traditional education, without academic training and without knowledge of PBL, which may explain the problems experienced with intertwining the theoretical and the practical (Ehrenberg and Häggblom, 2007).

Nursing education at our university

PBL was introduced in 1993 in the theoretical parts of the programme. The following positions are involved in the clinical education programme: senior clinical lectures, with a Doctoral Degree (PhD), clinical lectures, with a Master's Degree in nursing, head clinical supervisors (HS), RNs with long experience, some with a Master's Degree in nursing, clinical supervisors (RNs), head nurses (HNs), and licensed practical nurses (LPNs).

RNs on the hospital wards who serve as supervisors for RN students have described experiencing both a high workload and a large number of students to supervise; they have reported often feeling 'tired of students'. The students have had to change supervisors and patients often during their clinical practice, which made it difficult to achieve continuity in the learning process. The students were often critical of the clinical education (Hede, 2006), and the Agency for Higher Education has criticized the clinical education (Högskoleverket, 2007:23R).

The extension of PBL into clinical appraisal and supervision – description of the intervention, called 'patient-centred training in student-dedicated treatment rooms'

The idea behind this PBL strategy for clinical supervision is to apply PBL in clinical nursing training. The main components of the supervision strategy called 'patient-centred training in student-dedicated treatment rooms' are summarized in Table 1 and described in more detail below.

Students work alone or in pairs, taking responsibility for one treatment room

The nursing students were 'responsible' for patients placed in the student-dedicated room and for all nursing care, in collaboration with and with the support of the supervising RNs and LPNs. The location of the student-dedicated room could vary, but the idea was that the students would follow the same patients for several days. It is important that nursing students focus on their patients, and not on who their supervisor will be on a given day.

Focus on patients

The students were to focus on 'their own patients' instead of on who their supervisor would be that day. This allowed students to concentrate their energy on everything that concerned 'their own patients'. The clinical supervisor was nearby or present at all times.

Reflection

Opportunities for reflection were arranged on the basis of a given structure. The model used was Gibbs' reflection cycle (Gibbs, 1988). It is important that the clinical supervisor and the student jointly reflect on each work shift, every day. At the beginning of the course, each student received a laminated, pocket-sized card (the reflection card) based on Gibbs' reflective cycle.

Logbook

Keeping a logbook is an educational method that not only entails writing narratives, but also stresses reflection on and interpretation of experiences, which is central to the learning process. In the logbook, staff and students write their daily notes, like in a diary. The logbook serves as a means of communication between students and nursing staff. Included in the logbook was a checklist of medical procedures. The supervising RN signed the logbook

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