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# Competence of clinical teachers: A survey on perception of masters of nursing specialist postgraduates, their clinical teachers, and head nurses

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** To explore the current admittance situation of clinical teachers for masters of nursing specialist (MNS) postgraduates and to test the competence of clinical teachers in self-evaluation and other evaluations.

**Methods:** In this cross-sectional study, using a random number table, we chose 80 MNS postgraduates under clinical practice, their clinical teachers, and head nurses each from six hospitals in Hunan and Guangdong. The participants were tested on the basis of the *Clinical Teachers' Competence Inventory of MNS Postgraduates*. The competences of clinical teachers were evaluated by the three groups of participants.

**Results:** The aggregated scores of teacher competence as evaluated by the MNS postgraduates ( $181.33 \pm 24.95$ ) were lower than those assigned by both clinical teachers ( $190.75 \pm 24.30$ ) and their head nurses ( $198.53 \pm 18.90$ ), with significant differences in all dimensions except for clinical managing ability. The five highest rated items from all participants focused on the teachers' clinical nursing ability, and the five lowest rated items were mainly about their clinical research ability.

**Conclusion:** The evaluation from MNS postgraduates is obviously lower than the self-evaluation of clinical teachers, and all participants are aware of the deficiency in research ability of the teachers. Thus, the admittance and examination of clinical teachers should be controlled strictly. Training should be carried out immediately to strengthen their comprehensive abilities, especially their research ability.

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## 1. Introduction

Nursing postgraduate education has changed greatly in recent years, and relevant curricula have increased in flexibility and dynamics [1]. In general, the changes exactly cater to the social needs for advanced clinical nurses. Considering the healthcare developments that have raised the requirements for nursing, many countries are actively developing nursing postgraduate curricula and cultivating advanced nursing practices that are directly engaged in clinical work [2]. However, the strategies in China

remain unchanged. Increasing students have become masters of nursing specialist (MNS) candidates when it was offered in China in 2010 [3]. Meanwhile, more clinical nurses have been chosen to be clinical teachers of MNS postgraduates.

Clinical teaching as a bridge between theory and practice is the most important part of MNS postgraduate cultivation. Clinical teachers are vital in this process [4] because their comprehensive abilities decide the quality of clinical practice of MNS postgraduates [5]. The United States of America has established a strict and relatively perfect admission and evaluation system for clinical teachers of nursing postgraduates. The system states that clinical teachers should be at least masters or doctors from their own professional fields and should perform as clinical practice nurse practitioners or specialists with rich clinical experience and strong educational guidance [2]. The abilities of clinical teachers are evaluated from several aspects by using many mature scales, such as Clinical

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Teacher Competence Inventory (CTCI) [6], Nursing Clinical Teacher Effectiveness Inventory (NCTEI) [7], and NCTEI-based Ideal Teacher Competence Inventory [8].

China starts MNS late and it is still in the exploratory stage [9] because the tutors of MNS postgraduates are nursing professors or senior clinical nursing managers who are too busy to practice postgraduate guidelines. In addition, clinical teachers are only sourced from clinical nurses [10]. However, the abilities of clinical teachers differ largely because of nonexistent mature teacher admissions and examination criteria; moreover, those with insufficient experience do not know how to instruct MNS postgraduates, thereby preventing MNS postgraduates from achieving their learning goals [11,12]. In the past few months, our research group has built a qualification and examination system for clinical teachers of MNS postgraduates, followed by a competence evaluation inventory, by using Delphi's method [13]. The purposes of this study are to explore the current situation of clinical teacher qualification and to analyze the clinical teacher competences, as evaluated by teachers, MNS postgraduates, and head nurses. This way, we can understand the current situation, teaching abilities, and disadvantages of clinical teachers. Therefore, we could provide a gist for choosing, training, and testing clinical teachers of MNS postgraduates in the future.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

This is a pilot survey involving 170 clinical teachers of MNS postgraduate as a general sample. They work in six hospitals affiliated with three colleges in Hunan and Guangdong. We obtained the sample using a random number table. The total number of MNS postgraduate clinical teachers is limited; therefore, we set the extraction ratio to 50%, considering the difficulty of full extraction. The specific steps are as follows:

First, we acquired the names of all teachers from the hospital nursing department and numbered the names, arranged in alphabetical order, from 01 to 170. Second, a random number table that was automatically generated by a computer was used to read. We followed a reading rule: start from the third row in the fourth column, from left to right and from top to bottom. Every number we read was recorded, except for those repeated or not in the specified range. We obtained 85 numbers. To compare the self-evaluation and other evaluations of clinical teachers, we required that the data of MNS postgraduates, their clinical teachers, and teachers' head nurses were in a one-to-one correspondence. Therefore, the sample of head nurses was directly chosen from the list of definite teachers without repeated sampling. A total of 190 MNS postgraduates experienced or are currently experiencing guidance from those 170 teachers. Following the one-to-one correspondence principle, the list of MNS postgraduates was directly chosen according to the teachers' list. If a teacher guides more than one MNS

postgraduate, we would select one of them through the random number table method. Questionnaires were distributed to 85 sets of clinical teacher, MNS postgraduate and the teacher's head nurse, and 80 sets of questionnaires were returned.

The teachers, MNS postgraduates, and head nurses were all volunteers. The teachers had been teaching MNS postgraduates for more than 6 months, and 79 (98.75%) were females aged 28–47 years. The MNS postgraduates, aged 22–32 years, had at least 6 months of clinical practice. The head nurses, aged 29–48 years, were all females with 1–23 years of management experience. Among the head nurses, 56 (70.00%) were supervisor nurses, and 33 (41.25%) were chief superintendent nurses.

### 2.2. Instruments and measurements

- 1) Demographics of these three groups included age and gender. On the basis of the admission criteria for clinical teachers of MNS postgraduates (Table 1) [14], the teachers were asked to answer a questionnaire about their admission situations, including clinical working experience, clinical teaching experience, clinical research competence, computer technology, and English level.
- 2) The *Clinical Teachers' Competence Inventory of MNS Postgraduates* (CTCIMNSG) [14] was developed based on the training objectives of MNS postgraduates and the core competence of nurse specialists [3,15]. The inventory (Appendix file) consists of 51 items from five categories: clinical nursing ability, clinical teaching ability, clinical managing ability, clinical research ability, and interpersonal skills. Moreover, a satisfaction survey was added. We used a five-point Likert scale (each item with a score ranging from 1 to 5). A high score indicates a strong ability of the clinical teacher. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of CTCIMNSG was 0.96, with each domain ranging from 0.89 to 0.92. The content validity index was 0.93 across the full scale and ranged from 0.86 to 1.00 in each subscale and from 0.72 to 1.00 in each item. The factor analysis identified five common factors, each explaining more than 50% of total variance.

### 2.3. Procedures

Data were collected from six hospitals in Hunan and Guangdong. The hospitals were mainly affiliated with universities, including the University of South China, Central South University, and Southern Medical University. The CTCIMNSG checklists, demographic forms, and informed consent forms were sent to MNS postgraduates, their clinical teachers, and head nurses separately. The participants were asked to evaluate the clinical teachers' abilities by using scores from 1 to 5. Two investigators were responsible for distributing the questionnaires on the spot, and the electronic version was used in some places. The questionnaires were numbered after completion, and any questionnaire with less than

**Table 1**

Admission criteria for clinical teachers of MNS postgraduates.

Admission Criteria
1. Registered nurse
2. Bachelor's degree, senior vice title or higher. Graduate's degree, intermediate title or higher
3. Clinical working experience (Bachelor's degree > 10 years, graduate's degree > 5 years)
4. Clinical teaching experience (Bachelor's degree > 5 years, graduate's degree > 3 years)
5. Grade A at the National Professional and Technical Foreign Language Test
6. Adept at using basic computer programs (e.g. word, office, PPT) and network resource
7. Having hosted or taken part in at least 1 scientific project of province or department level or above in recent 5 years
8. Having published at least 2 first-author papers on province-level core journals or above in recent 3 years
9. Specialist Nurse Qualification Certificate

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