

Understanding the enrolled nurse to registered nurse journey through a model adapted from Schlossberg's transition theory

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ABSTRACT

Background: Substantial numbers of Enrolled Nurses (ENs) enrol in higher education programs to undergo the transition to Registered Nurse (RN) with the experience described as containing numerous challenges.

Objectives: This paper reports on a synthesis of the literature that explores the experiences of ENs undertaking a program of study to convert to RN. Consequently, a model is developed to identify educational interventions and resources to enable a successful transition for these students.

Design: A narrative review was completed with thematic synthesis of the literature guided by Schlossberg's Transition Theory, and Thomas and Harden's framework for systematic analysis of qualitative studies.

Data sources: CINAHL, Scopus, ProQuest Central and Health Collection were searched.

Review methods: The databases were searched for English language journal articles, theses and grey literature published from 1987 to 2016 from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada and the USA. The key search words included truncations of: "enrolled nurse", "licensed practical nurse", "transition", "conversion" and "experience". This resulted in the identification of 33 related articles for review.

Results: Themes and sub-themes developed from the literature synthesis were integrated into an 'EN to RN Transition model.' The four stages of the model reflect the experiences of the ENs as they overcame the various challenges they encountered during their transition to RN. The model was used to develop recommendations that may improve their transition experience and decrease attrition.

Conclusion: This paper reports on a synthesis of the literature, and presents a four stage model, that reflects the experiences of ENs in their transition to RN. Recognising the elements within each stage can assist educators develop strategies and provide educational resources to enhance the EN journey.

1. Introduction

There are increasing numbers of Australian, New Zealand (NZ), and United Kingdom (UK) Enrolled Nurses (ENs) and other international equivalents, such as North American Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), enrolling in programs of study to undertake the transition to become Registered Nurses (RNs). It is important that these transition experiences are well understood to ensure strategies for their success are optimised, particularly in the current context of global nursing shortages. Increased adverse patient events have been linked with nursing shortages (World Health Organization, 2011; Gore et al., 2017) with McLaughlin et al. (2010) recommending the introduction of policies to decrease attrition from nursing programs as one strategy to tackle this dilemma.

The reasons for the attrition of students from nursing programs are often unclear (Laming and Kelly, 2013). However the impact this attrition has is potentially significant, particularly when it is predicted

internationally that there will be large nursing workforce shortfalls into the future (Health Workforce Australia, 2014; Liu et al., 2017). One recommendation to increase the nursing workforce in Australia has been to encourage ENs to upgrade their qualifications to RN (Kenny and Duckett, 2005; Rapley et al., 2006). While this strategy can make a valuable contribution to the RN workforce, there are a wide range of motivating factors that influence ENs to want to make the transition to RN, and a broad range of transition experiences (Wall, 2016). Despite ENs commencing programs to achieve this transition, the evidence indicates that they may struggle to succeed in the tertiary environment when compared to traditional entry students (Doggrell and Schaffer, 2016). Synthesising an understanding of their experiences is integral to providing the resources, support and educational strategies needed to inform a positive and successful transition and address any potential attrition from these programs. To inform knowledge around how to improve the ENs' and EN equivalents' experiences as they study to become RNs, and potentially reduce attrition in this area, this paper uses

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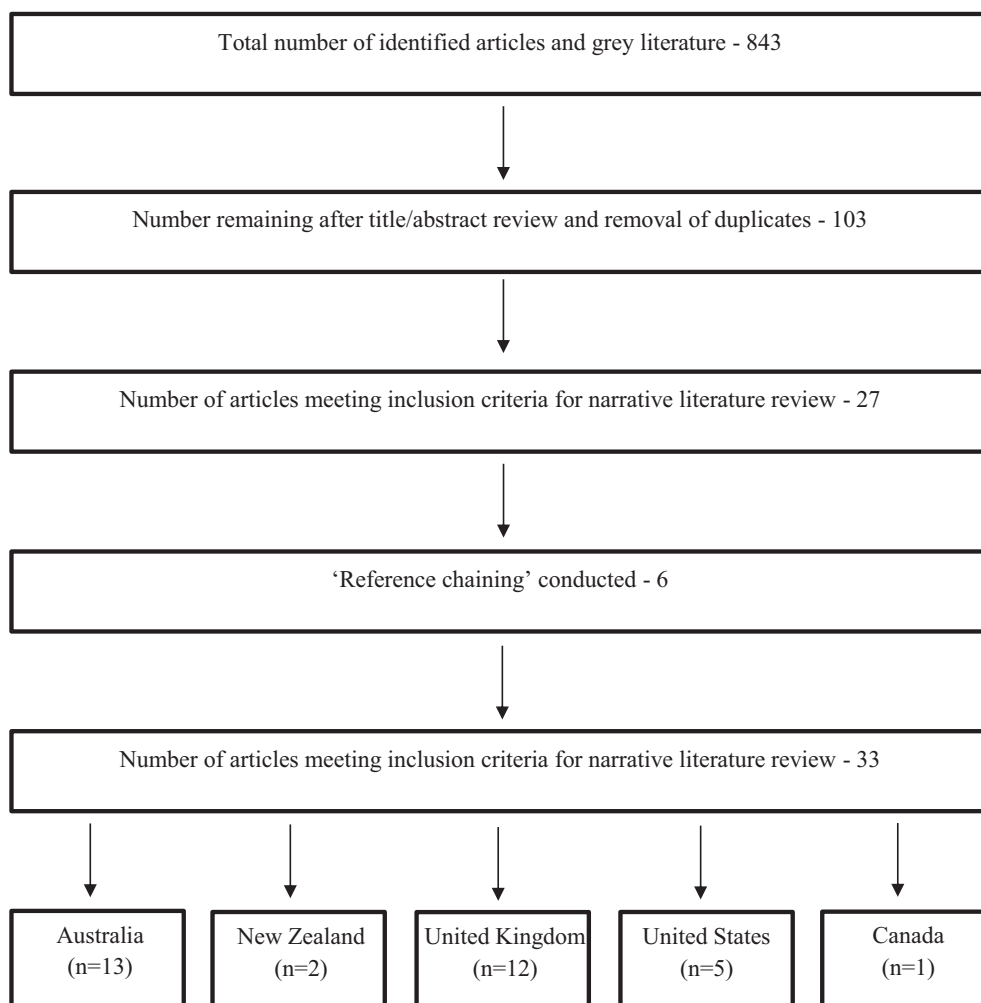


Fig. 1. Narrative Literature Search Process.

the Transition Theory of Schlossberg et al. (1995) to guide a synthesis of the relevant research. This synthesis has then been represented in a model that describes the various stages of that transition.

2. Conceptual Framework

The suitability for the use of Schlossberg's Transition Theory as a guide for examining EN's experiences is illustrated in her seminal article where she discusses the development of a model "in which transitions of all kinds... can be analysed, and possible interventions formulated" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 3). The model has evolved since its original development (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Anderson et al., 2012) and now contains three major components related to stage of transition, identification of coping resources and methods for strengthening those resources.

The first component, "Approaching Transitions", involves the identification of the individual's perspective of where they are placed within the transition and whether they are "moving in", "moving through" or "moving out" (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The second component of Transition Theory, 'Taking stock of coping resources: The 4 S system', involves identifying the transitioning individual's perspective of their coping resources and places them into categories of "situation", "self", "support" and "strategies". The third and final component of Transition Theory, 'Taking charge: strengthening resources' (Schlossberg et al., 1995), integrates several counselling techniques with the focus on developing the transitioning individual's coping resources. Applying the various transitional stages and the 4 S System to

the synthesis of relevant literature has enabled the development of an 'EN to RN Transition model'. This model encapsulates the ENs' transition experiences and provides an overview of their journey from their planning for their enrolment in the Bachelor of Nursing (BN) program through to their final preparation to enter the RN workforce.

3. Search Strategies and Search Results

The literature search for this review was conducted by the first author and sought knowledge related to the experiences of ENs undertaking RN programs in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. Studies conducted in the North America were also included as, despite their variations in nursing career structure and education, it was found that the shared pathway of study of the LPNs (EN equivalent) to RN was similar enough to provide information that enriched the findings from an international perspective.

The search was confined to those studies published between 1987 and 2016. These parameters were chosen as the year 1986 was significant for ENs in the United Kingdom (UK) as the Central Council of Nursing announced the imminent cessation of EN training (Hembrough and Sheehan, 1989; Milligan, 2007). This decision then led to the development of many EN to RN conversion courses in the UK along with associated discussion and research into the scope of practice and future of ENs, which increased from this time throughout other countries, including New Zealand and Australia.

Saturation of the literature related to the search inquiry was achieved through using several strategies. The first included electronic

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