



Utilisation of academic nursing competence in Europe — A survey among members of the European Academy of Nursing Science



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ABSTRACT

Background: In line with national and international strategies in Europe, the number of nurses with a doctoral degree has increased. The European Academy of Nursing Science (EANS) has for 18 years delivered a three-year doctoral summer school for nurses. Questions have been raised in terms of how academic nurses' competencies are used and in what positions.

Aim: To understand the progression of nurses' academic careers following completion of the EANS Summer School and to picture how research and academic skills of the nurses are being used for research and/or other fields in nursing.

Methods: We commenced a cross-sectional survey. Former EANS Summer School participants were invited to take part in the online survey with questions developed specifically for this study. The study conformed to the principle of good clinical research practice and was reviewed and approved by the EANS Board.

Results: Of 380 former participants, 308 were eligible for participating in the survey. A total of 140 (45%) responded. The respondents originated from 21 countries. Sixty-nine percent had their main position in universities or university colleges and 25% in healthcare organisations. More than 80% were involved in research, teaching and supervision, and 26% were involved in direct client/patients care while 71% reported doing postdoctoral research where descriptive research designs dominated. The research topics covered a large variety of aspects in clinical nursing, education, development and theory.

Conclusion: The EANS Summer School is an example of an effort to improve nurses' academic competencies. The survey indicates that the competencies of academically trained nurses in Europe primarily are used in universities and educational institutions. However, a large proportion is working close to and in collaboration with clinical practice. Evidence of the legacy of having undergone the EANS Summer School includes using advanced research methods and collaboration with the international EANS network.

1. Introduction

In line with the national and international strategies for the nursing profession, there has been an increase in the numbers of nurses in Europe with a doctoral degree. This strategy is based on the belief that the highest level of knowledge and a powerful and internationally competitive base should be available in all professions to ensure the present and future vitality of European healthcare. Further, European recommendations are to build nursing research capacity to strengthen and support nurses in societies' efforts to tackle health challenges and in providing safe, high-quality, effective and efficient health services (World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe, 2015). Correspondingly, one of the ten recommendations from the European Science

Foundation (ESF) is that to strengthen the implementation of medical research in clinical practice, countries should improve the education and training of all health professionals and provide them with a clinical academic career structure (Høygaard et al., 2011).

One example is from England, where recently there has been considerable government investment to encourage non-medical allied health clinicians such as nurses to undertake research training, alongside their clinical activity. In accordance with the UK National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) objectives, this is with the ultimate aim to improve the quality of care and future health status of the population (National Institute for Health Research, 2016b). Since 2014, Health Education England and NIHR have offered clinical nurses and allied health professionals an Integrated Clinical Academic Programme on

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five levels that funds fellowships at masters level to doctoral and post-doctoral levels (National Institute for Health Research, 2016a; 2016b). Indeed, most other European countries offer nurses academic education at masters and doctoral level with the intention that the competencies achieved will be used for clinical research and development.

However, over the last few years, there have been debates around the competencies and qualifications of registered nurses. In England, slogans as “too posh to wash” were coined, questioning how degree qualifications in nursing were drawing nurses away from bedside caring (Beer, 2013). This particularly followed critical reports on some UK health trusts that found unacceptable levels of care, systematic failings and uncaring healthcare cultures (Beer, 2013). Similarly, in other European countries questions have during the last few decades been raised about the increases in academically educated nurses. This in terms of how to use academic nurses' competencies and in what positions. The need for Master and PhD prepared nurses has even been questioned (e.g. in Denmark and Norway) (Østby, 2014; Holge-Hazelton et al., 2016).

As part of the effort to raise academic standards in nursing and nursing research, the European Academy of Nursing Science (EANS) has for 19 years delivered a three-year doctoral summer school for nurses. The Academy has emerged from a European nursing network and is an independently organised body. It comprises individual members who have made significant contributions to the advancement of nursing science in Europe through scholarship and research (The European Academy of Nursing Science, 2016). The summer school participants attend three consecutive annual schools held across Europe. The intensive summer school lasts for two weeks in year one and for one week in year two and three. Since its inauguration in 1998, the curriculum of the summer school has changed over time. Since 2010 it has been organised around the UK Medical Research Council's complex interventions framework (Craig et al., 2008). The summer school's aims are to equip the new generation of early stage European nursing researchers with knowledge and expertise in advanced translational complex interventions research methods. Furthermore, it aims to enable these researchers to design, plan and implement programmatic, mixed methods and complex interventions research in nursing, create a multi-state common European learning environment for doctoral nursing students and to enhance the opportunities for doctoral students to study, work and undertake research in other European states. Funded by the ESF, EANS also developed the REFLECTION network to further strengthen and lead translational nursing intervention research in Europe by supporting the EANS Summer School, master classes and research networking (Richards and Borglin, 2011).

These initiatives represent prolonged and sustained contributions to the scientific education and research capacity building for nurses who are early stage researchers in Europe. Therefore, it is of intense interest to the Academy, European educators and policy makers to know how nurses use the competencies obtained through this summer school in their subsequent careers, and to explore the legacy of the summer school and to what extent networking among previous students is taking place.

2. Objective

To know:

- 1) how the academic careers of nurses who have completed the EANS Summer School for Doctoral Students have progressed in the period since completion;
- 2) how the research and academic skills of EANS' members are being used in research or other fields of nursing.

Thus, we investigated the following main research questions:

- Where do EANS Summer School graduates work and in what

positions?

- What areas does their work involve?
- To what extent are they doing research and what characterises their research being performed with respect to topics, methods and collaborations?
- What do the EANS Summer School graduates consider to be the most important legacy of participating in the EANS Summer School?

3. Methods

We undertook a cross-sectional survey. We designed our survey instrument specifically for the study so that questions included questions on participant demographic aspects, details about their workplaces and their research activities. Questions were a mixture of fixed and open response options. We piloted our survey questions among the members of EANS' Board prior to undertaking the full survey.

Participants were nurses who had participated in at least one year of the EANS Summer School between 1998 and 2014. We received information about eligible participants and their contact details from the membership database of EANS. Requests to complete the questionnaire were distributed to eligible and potential respondents by email. Where emails were returned as undeliverable, we complemented the database information with searches using Google and PubMed publications searches on specific names.

Participants completed the survey online. We developed the electronic survey using the ‘Quest back’ software with questions written specifically to cover the themes specified in the purpose and research questions. Most of the questions had fixed response alternatives e.g. “yes”, “no”, “does not apply to me”. A few questions were open allowing the respondents to give a descriptive response. We distributed the survey electronically in June 2015 with three reminders.

4. Ethics and Research Approvals

The study did not encompass sensitive personal or health information, as defined by the Norwegian Health Research Act, and did thus not need ethical research approval. The study was performed in accordance with procedures for good clinical research practice at University Hospital North Norway, the institution responsible for this research. The EANS Board approved using the contact information from the EANS member database and reviewed and approved the survey. Participation by respondents was voluntary — by responding to the survey participants consented to participate. We ensured that no information in our dataset linked the email addresses needed for data collection, including reminders, to individual responses. Further, the participants were ensured that the data would be made anonymous after data had been collected and that no one would be identified in reports/publications. Data was stored at the University Hospital North Norway. We ensured that we presented results confidentially to prevent indirect identification of respondents.

5. Data Analysis

We analysed numeric data descriptively using SPSS version 22. We present our results as raw scores and percentages. We imported responses to the open questions into Microsoft Word and thereafter categorised them — using either direct categorization or summative qualitative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

6. Results

We identified a total of 380 former participants and their e-mail addresses from the lists kept in the EANS administrative archives. After following the identification steps in the methods above, we found a total of 308 participants with valid email addresses who were eligible for participating in the survey.

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