

Review

Exploring undergraduate nursing students' perceptions of working in aged care settings: A review of the literature

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To explore undergraduate nursing students' perceptions of working in the aged care setting through a review of the literature.

Design: A review of available literature relating to undergraduate nursing students' attitudes, perceptions and experiences in the aged care setting, or in the care of older adults.

Data sources: CINAHL Plus with Full Text was the primary database used. Other databases include PsycINFO and Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition.

Review methods: Studies focused on undergraduate nursing students and their experiences in the aged care setting and on the perceptions and attitudes of nursing students toward older adults, were included. Studies that did not present an original study or those that did not meet the aim of the study were excluded from the review.

Results: Following removal of duplicates and exclusion of articles not meeting the aim of this paper, 24 articles remained. Three main themes emerged from the review of the literature: perceptions of aged care placement, attitudes to working in aged care, and experiences in aged care.

Conclusion: The experiences of nursing students employed as undergraduate AINs in the aged care setting can provide an immersive clinical learning experience in preparation for their new graduate (NG) year. Furthermore, it is an opportunity to challenge ageist attitudes and instil core nursing values in novice nurses such as promoting compassionate care.

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Introduction

Debates about the practice readiness of new graduate (NG) nurses have widened the divide between universities and the healthcare industry with discussions often focusing on who is more responsible for preparing nursing students for the clinical environment (Wolff et al., 2010). The divide between universities and the healthcare industry is partly due to varying definitions of what it means to be prepared for practice (Wolff et al., 2010).

Bachelor of nursing students are actively recruited to work as assistants in nursing (AIN) while completing their undergraduate nursing program as part of an incentive implemented by New South Wales Health in 2001. The incentive aimed to further the development of knowledge and clinical skills for bachelor of nursing students (Ferguson and Day, 2007; Grealish and Trevitt, 2005). Since the implementation of undergraduate AIN employment in healthcare facilities, there has been limited inquiry into the potential significance of undergraduate AIN employment in preparing new graduates for the clinical work environment.

The majority of undergraduate AINs are employed in the aged care setting (Happell, 2002). However, previous research has alluded that undergraduate nursing students do not value employment in aged care facilities as beneficial to their nursing education in terms of skill

acquisition and professional development (Algosu and Peters, 2012). To identify the potential significance of undergraduate AIN employment in aged care to nursing education, it is important to understand factors within student experiences in aged care settings that influence their perceptions of aged care nursing. Review of the literature can highlight existing knowledge on the relationship between experiences and perceptions that affect students' learning experiences in the aged care setting. Understanding this relationship can help determine whether undergraduate AIN employment in aged care can potentially contribute to preparing nursing students for their NG year. In this review, aged care nursing will refer to settings where care for the elderly is the focus of practice, such as geriatric units and residential care.

Aim

The aim of this review is to explore undergraduate nursing students' perceptions of working in aged care settings.

Methods

The search terms "Undergraduate nursing students OR nursing students" and "aged care OR geriatrics OR geriatric nursing OR residential care" and "experiences OR perceptions" were entered into CINAHL

Plus with Full Text, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition and PsycINFO through a Boolean/Phrase search mode. Searching these databases produced a cumulative total of 3,560 articles. The search total was reduced to 380 results through the application of search limitations. These limitations included peer-reviewed, full-text, English-language articles from 2000 to 2015 that presented original research and were related to nursing and gerontological care. A total of 39 articles were identified as relevant for inclusion in the review following examination of the journal abstract (as shown in Fig. 1, PRISMA flow diagram).

Articles were considered relevant and included in the review of the literature if they focused on undergraduate nursing students and their clinical experiences in the aged care setting. Further, articles focusing on nursing students' perceptions and attitudes toward older adults and older adult care were also included in the review. Studies on perceptions and attitudes of nursing students were considered relevant to the review as experiences in the clinical setting often influence perceptions. Additionally, learning experiences can be affected by students' perceptions and attitudes. Including a review on the perceptions and attitudes of nursing students toward older adults provides a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of nursing students in aged care.

Articles were excluded if they did not present original research; were related to cultural exploration of attitudes; focused on health professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and physicians or midwifery students; or focused on student experiences in

other specialisations (for example, palliative care). Furthermore, articles relating to personal care assistants (PCAs), AINs or nursing assistants (NA) who were not enrolled in an undergraduate nursing program were excluded. The 39 articles that were initially selected for inclusion in the review were further evaluated for eligibility according to the aforementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria. Fifteen articles were additionally excluded as they presented studies that were not from the perspective of undergraduate nursing students and were a meta-synthesis or systematic review. Twenty-four articles remained and are included in this review of the literature (Fig. 1, PRISMA flow diagram). Articles were reviewed according to the critical review guidelines for qualitative and quantitative studies as outlined in Schneider et al. (2007).

Abstracts were read and re-read by the first author and in consultation with co-authors, whom are experienced researchers, to determine relevance to nursing students' experiences in the aged care setting and preparation for practice. Articles considered suitable to meet the aim of the literature review were read and re-read to gain a thorough understanding of its content and confirm its relevance. Following removal of duplicates and exclusion of articles, 24 articles were thematically analysed for this literature review. Common concepts between each of the 24 articles were identified and grouped into themes by the author and co-authors. Data were first divided into experiences and perceptions of aged care, which formed three major themes. Further analysis of common concepts then lead to the formation of six sub-themes.

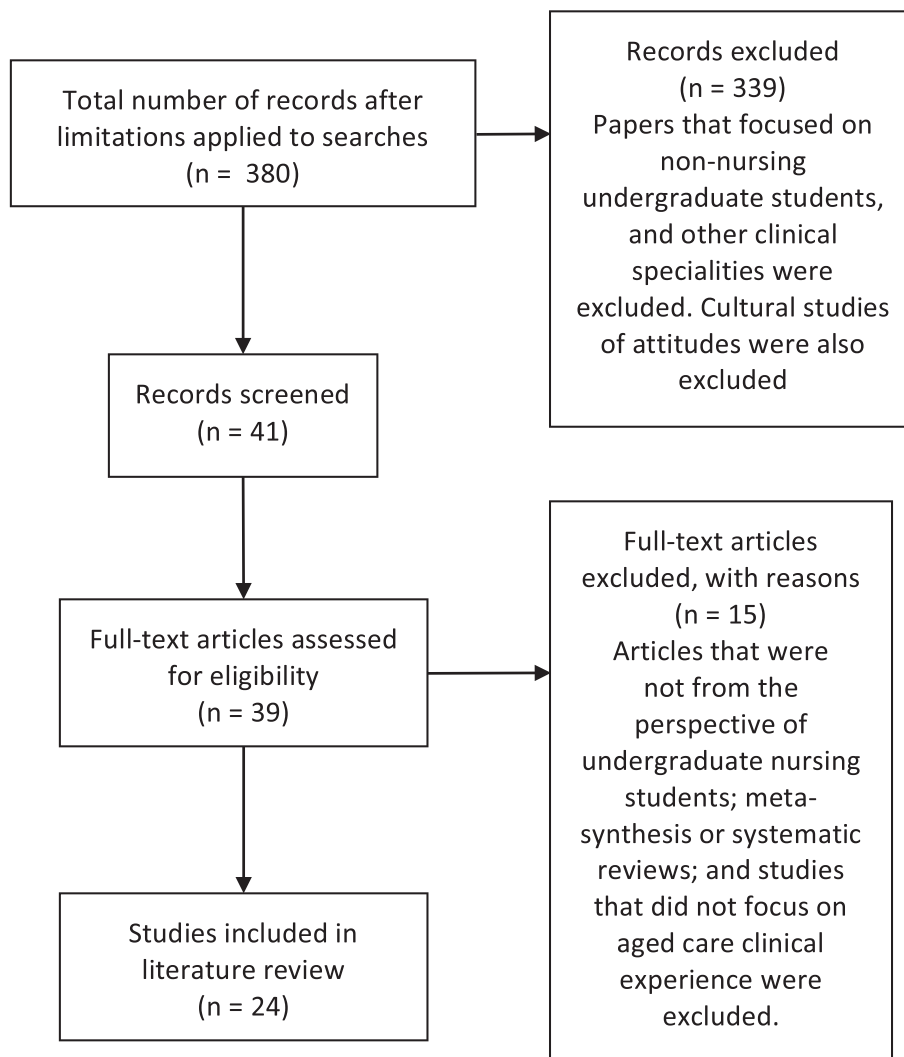


Fig. 1. Process of article selection—PRISMA flow diagram.

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