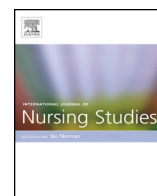




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Review

Nursing students' perceptions of community care and other areas of nursing practice – A review of the literature

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To review recent literature on student nurses' perceptions of different areas of nursing practice, in particular community care. Healthcare is changing from care delivery in institutional settings to care to patients in their own homes. Problematic is that nursing students do not see community care as an attractive line of work, and their perceptions of community care do not reflect the realities of the profession. Understanding the factors influencing the perception of the professional field is important to positively influence students' willingness to see community nursing as a future profession.

Design: Literature search with accompanying narrative synthesis of primary research.

Data sources: ERIC[®], PsycInfo[®], Pubmed[®], and CINAHL[®] (2004–2014) databases using the search terms: 'nursing student', 'student nurse', 'community care', 'community nurse', 'image', 'attitude', and 'perception'.

Review methods: After screening 522 retrieved article titles with abstracts, the number of articles was reduced based upon specified inclusion/exclusion criteria leading to inclusion of 34. Evaluation of the references in those articles yielded an additional 5 articles. A narrative synthesis of those articles was created to uncover students' perception of community care, other areas of professional practice, and the factors influencing those perceptions.

Results: 39 articles were selected. Results show that many nursing students begin their education with a lay person's conception of the profession, shaped by media representations. Work placements in different settings offer clinical experience that helps students orient themselves towards a future profession. Students prefer hospitals as a place of work, because of the acute nature and technologically advanced level of care offered there. Few students perceive mental health and elderly care as appealing. Perceptions of community care can vary widely, the most prevalent view being that it is unattractive because of its chronic care profile, with little technical skill, untrained workers, and a high workload. However, another view is that it offers challenging and meaningful work because of the variety of caregiving roles and the opportunity to work independently.

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Conclusions: Few nursing students choose community nursing as a future profession. They have a limited and often mistaken view of community care, and they underestimate the field's complexity because it is less visible than in the environment of acute care. Providing students with specific curricular content and employing a structured approach to preparation for work placement could help build a more positive perception of community care, leading to more students seeing/choosing community care as a desirable field of work.

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What is already known about the topic?

- Though nursing care is on the continuum of intramural to extramural health care, only a limited number of nursing students orient themselves towards a career in community nursing during their training.
- Factors that determine a student's choice to work in a particular field of work are diverse and complex. The *Nursing Career Development Framework* provides insight into these factors.
- Students prefer a challenging work environment where skills in nursing techniques are important; this perspective is prominently observed within acute care in a general hospital setting.

What this paper adds

- Students have both positive and negative perceptions of community care, however they are not aware of the more attractive complex aspects of this field of work.
- Students do not recognise the attractive complexity in community care because this is less prominent than in other, for them more attractive, professional fields.
- Influencing conceptions and perspective may solve a workforce problem in community care.

1. Background

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in healthcare provided by community nurses, leading to a need for more well-educated community nurses ([World Health Organisation \(WHO\), 2008](#)). The number of nursing students who see this field of work as an interesting prospective future career, however, is limited ([Larsen et al., 2012](#); [Norman, 2015](#)). Many students tend to see intramural settings, in particular general hospitals, as more desirable from a career point of view, and they see the intramural and extramural settings as two separate worlds. Due to the intramural focus of many nursing teaching programmes and the lack of satisfactory community-based work placement opportunities, students are insufficiently aware of the community healthcare field ([Betony and Yarwood, 2013](#); [Bjørk et al., 2014](#)). Students' limited interest in community-based work is also influenced by external factors that can distort their perceptions of the field, including the news media ([Norman, 2015](#)).

The shift in healthcare from intramural to extramural in many Western countries is associated with ageing populations and an increase in multimorbidity. Between

2013 and 2050, the population ≥ 60 years will increase from 11.7% to 21.1% worldwide ([United Nations \(UN\), 2013](#)). The number of people at an even more advanced age (≥ 80 years) will increase from 14% in 2013 to 19% in 2050 ([UN, 2013](#)). The number of people having more than one chronic medical condition worldwide is 7.8% at present, and will continue to increase due to the ageing population ([Afshar et al., 2015](#)). Moreover, elderly people continue to live in their own homes longer ([WHO, 2011](#)). Therefore, the number of patients with complex healthcare issues living outside of a facility and receiving healthcare at home will become the largest patient group in the future, and will thus present special challenges to nurses.

It seems that nursing students are not aware of this development, as evidenced by the way they orient themselves towards their future profession. The degree to which the requirements of a field of work are in line with personality traits, the preference for working with a certain type of patient, the preference for the context in which care is provided, and the knowledge and skills required in a work setting are determining factors in the choice of professional field ([Kloster et al., 2007](#)). However, many nursing students prefer a career in the hospital in an acute care setting or in paediatric nursing, and only a limited number of students are interested in community (home-based) care. [Kloster et al. \(2007\)](#) found that only 7% of students in Norway chose community nursing at the end of the nursing programme. [McCann et al. \(2010\)](#) studied the choice of work setting among nursing students in Australia, and found confirmation of the fact that acute adult care was the most popular choice, as 56% of the students preferred this field of work. It can be concluded, therefore, that the lack of interest of nursing students in community nursing is not in line with the needs of society and the labour market. An improved understanding of students' perception of this field is needed to help nursing schools develop strategies to increase interest in community care.

1.1. A model to analyse students' perception of healthcare fields

Students' perceptions of healthcare fields are influenced by a multiplicity of factors. [Hickey et al. \(2012a\)](#) developed a model to chart the factors influencing students' preferences for a future career, the *Nursing Career Development Framework* based on Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory* ([1979](#)) and *Socioecological Model* ([1999](#)), as they felt that available theories on

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