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Teaching and supporting nursing students on clinical placements: Doing the right thing

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ABSTRACT

Problem: Pre registration nursing students do not always feel supported by Registered Nurses during their clinical placements. To help develop and refine clinical skills, in order to deliver safe, competent nursing care, nursing students rely on Registered Nurses to teach and support them in their clinical learning.

Background: Pre-registration nursing students in Australia must undertake a minimum of 800 clinical placement hours as part of their undergraduate nursing education. Registered Nurses are required to provide professional development and to teach and support students during these clinical placements. Little is known about Registered Nurses' understanding of this nursing standard requirement.

Aim: To explore Registered Nurses' understanding of the nursing standard requirement to provide professional development to pre-registration nursing students during their clinical placements.

Methods: A Grounded Theory study was used involving in-depth semi-structured individual interviews to gather data from fifteen Registered Nurse participants. Constant comparative analysis was used to analyse the data and it was from this data analysis that the substantive theory emerged.

Findings: The substantive theory developed as a result of this research is titled, **Doing the Right Thing**. The core category, **the right thing to do**, is informed by four elements; **sense of responsibility**, an **added extra, choice**, and **nursing standard**.

Conclusion: Registered Nurses are motivated to teach and support nursing students on clinical placements because they believe it is **the right thing to do**.

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Summary of relevance

Nursing students on clinical placements do not always feel supported by Registered Nurses. No prior research was identified that examined whether Australian Registered Nurses are aware that the nursing standards require them to teach and support nursing students on clinical placements. This research examined Registered Nurses' understanding of the nursing standard requirement to teach and support nursing students. This research found that Registered Nurses are not aware that nursing standards require them to provide professional development to nursing students by teaching and supporting students when on their clinical placements.

1. Introduction

Registered Nurses (RNs) are expected to provide professional development to undergraduate nursing students by teaching and supporting them on their clinical placements. In fact, RNs involvement in the professional development of nursing students on clinical placements is a nursing standard requirement (Anderson, Moxham, & Broadbent, 2016). In countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom nursing standards are embedded within the RN licence to practice (Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia [NMBA] 2016b; Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2015; Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2015). This research explored RNs' understanding of the requirement to provide professional development to nursing students by teaching and supporting them during their clinical placements.

2. Background

In Australia when an RN renews their annual licence to practice they are required to complete a self-assessment form. Within

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this form they self-declare competence to practice as an RN under the standards for practice (NMBA, 2016b). Annual licence renewal for RNs to practice occurs not only in Australia. Other countries such as New Zealand and the United Kingdom (UK) require RNs to annually complete self-assessment forms stating they are meeting the licence requirements, which include meeting the nursing standards within their respective countries (Heartfield & Gibson, 2005; et al., 2015; Heartfield & Gibson, 2005; et al., 2015; Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2015).

This study focused on RNs' understanding of Australian nursing standards that state RNs:

- are responsible and accountable for supervision and the delegation of nursing activity to enrolled nurses and others. . .
- actively fosters a culture of safety and learning that includes engaging with health professionals and others, to share knowledge and practice that supports person-centred care. . .
- contribute to the [professional] development of others. (NMBA, 2016a, pp. 1&3; NMBA, 2016a, pp. 1&3)

In the Australian nursing standards the term 'others' includes nursing students. When RNs in Australia renew their licence to practice as a RN they are, in fact, making a personal declaration that they have an understanding of this nursing standard requirement.

Students, who depend on the RNs to teach and support them during their clinical placements, must be exposed to various clinical areas during their clinical placements (Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council, 2012). According to the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (2012, p. 18) "the program provider ensures that every student is given a variety of supervised workplace experiences conducted in environments providing suitable opportunities and conditions for students". This means nursing students are exposed to a variety of clinical areas and students are often supervised by a number of different RNs during the course of their clinical placement experiences.

The RNs role with nursing students is integral to nursing students' clinical education. RNs' role with students helps to ensure a competent future nursing workforce (O'Brien et al., 2014). Sometimes however, nursing students do not have good learning experiences during their clinical placements (Morrell, & Ridgway, 2014). Nursing students rely on RNs to teach and support them during their clinical placements so they can become safe practitioners. This paper reports on the findings from qualitative research that examined Registered Nurses' understanding of the nursing standard requirement to provide professional development to nursing students by teaching and supporting them during their clinical placements.

3. Methods

3.1. Methodology

Grounded theory was the methodology used in this study. Grounded theory guided an exploration to enable an understanding of the topic. There was no known research on RNs understanding of the nursing standard requirement to provide professional development to nursing students by teaching and supporting them during their clinical placements. This methodology enabled a substantive theory to be developed to explain RNs' understanding of the nursing standard requirement to provide professional development to nursing students by teaching and supporting them during their clinical placements

3.2. Ethics approval

Ethics approval for this study was granted by the University of Wollongong/ISLHD Health and Medical Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Approval No: HE12/141).

3.3. Participants

This study was conducted in the state of Queensland, Australia. Fifteen participants were interviewed. All participants were RNs with at least 5 years' experience. These criteria were chosen because it is highly probable that an RN with at least 5 years' experience would have had contact with nursing students on clinical placements. These inclusion criteria ensured that participants could provide input based on their previous clinical placement experiences with nursing students. Thirteen of the participants were female and two of the participants were male.

3.4. Data collection

Data was collected using semi-structured individual interviews. Each participant ($n=15$) was interviewed once. Interviews were approximately 45 min in duration. Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Data saturation, as a result of using the constant comparative data analysis technique, occurred after interviews with fifteen participants. Three interviews were conducted face to face and the remaining twelve interviews were conducted via telephone.

3.5. Data analysis

As per Grounded Theory methodology, data analysis was done using a constant comparative method. Data was analysed following the first interview and then after each consequent interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data was compared with data and was systematically categorised into codes. Codes were analysed, and compared and then coded either into existing categories or formed new categories. It was this analysis of data that compelled new data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Codes and categories were constantly compared with existing codes and categories. When no new data emerged categories became saturated, that is, data saturation had occurred. With data saturation a core category emerged and the substantive theory developed.

4. Findings

4.1. The substantive theory: Doing the Right Thing

The right thing to do emerged as the core category. It was evident throughout the data that the participants were teaching and supporting nursing studies on clinical placement because they believed it was **the right thing to do**. Participants in this study felt an overwhelming **sense of responsibility** to teach and support nursing students and expressed that providing such professional development was **the right thing to do**. The participants felt students to be **an added extra** to their daily work. Even though students were considered to be **an added extra**, the RNs did what they believed to be **the right thing to do** and provided professional development to nursing students during their clinical placements. Participants perceived it was a RNs' **choice** whether or not to be involved in providing professional development to nursing students on clinical placement. Participants were respectful of their peers' decision if they chose not to be involved with nursing students. Research findings indicated a lack of awareness of the **nursing standard** requirement to teach and support students. Despite whether participants were aware of this nursing standard requirement or not,

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