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The factors impacting personal and professional experiences of migrant nurses in Australia: An integrative review

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This integrative review presents an exploration of the literature on the factors that impact on internationally educated nurses' personal and professional experiences during their journey into the Australian health workforce.

Background: Over the past few decades there has been an increase in the number of internationally educated nurses migrating to work in other developed countries. In Australia, these nurses have been sought to curb nurse shortages to support the forecasted ageing population. Using a validated integrative review framework, databases such as Scopus; MEDLINE; CINAHL; PubMed; Web of Science and Google Scholar were searched for qualitative studies published before 2016. Reviewed articles were analysed for data that was reduced, compared and synthesised and outlined in a figure.

Methods: Using a validated integrative review framework, databases such as Scopus; MEDLINE; CINAHL; PubMed; Web of Science and Google Scholar were searched for qualitative studies published before 2016. Reviewed articles were analysed for data that was reduced, compared and synthesised and outlined in a figure.

Findings: From the twenty-two articles that met the inclusion criteria-eight factors were identified. The majority (n=6) of these were challenging factors common to personal and professional experiences, which include: pre-migration processes; recognising and adapting to a new reality; living and working in the English language; economic and social stress; discrimination and feeling like an 'outsider' and resolving issues and finding meaning in the new reality. The remaining two factors facilitated nurses' experiences personally with personal support systems and professionally with recruitment and working conditions.

Conclusion: This review reports that internationally educated nurses predominantly face challenging factors that impact their lives socioeconomically in and out of the workplace. Policy makers, managers and educators working with these nurses could develop strategies that minimise challenging factors and maximise facilitating factors leading to successful transitions.

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Summary of relevance

Problem

In Australia, the factors impacting the personal and professional experiences of internationally educated nurses (IENs) are poorly understood.

What is already known?

The international literature reports that IENs experience a multitude of complex issues that impact on their migration and transition experiences when travelling to settle in a new country.

What does this paper add?

This integrative review adds to the evidence that IENs migrating to work in Australia disproportionately face more systemic challenges that negatively impact on their personal and professional experiences. While the factors that facilitate more positive experiences are reported, this study highlights that policies and programs can enhance the Australian IENs in their transition journey.

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1. Introduction

Skilled nurse migrants are nurses who travel to another country to seek employment opportunities (Newton, Pillay, & Higginbottom, 2012; Xu & He, 2012). They also represent one of the largest and most internationally mobile occupations (Adeniran et al., 2008; Kodoth & Kuriakose Jacob, 2013). There have been various articles that document the 'push' and 'pull' factors that motivate these nurses to seek work in other countries (Blythe & Baumann, 2009; Hardill & MacDonald, 2000; Kingma, 2007) and over the past decade, greater migration has occurred subsequent to improvements in working conditions and recruiting strategies from recipient countries (ICN, 2007 International Council of Nurses [ICN], 2007). These changes, however, have impacted negatively on lesser developed donor countries that are themselves affected by nurse shortages (ICN, 2007). In Australia, Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) are a significant workforce resource to supplement the shortage of domestic nurses apportioned for the increasing ageing population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014; Blythe & Baumann, 2009; International Council of Nurse, 2015). However, the number of IENs who are currently in the nursing workforce is not collected by the Immigration Department, census data or the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). In the literature, skilled migrant nurses are also commonly referred to as Overseas Qualified Nurses (OQN) or IENs. For clarity purposes, IENs will be used throughout the review to describe these skilled migrant nurses. This integrative review will provide an overview of the current situation for IENs who travel to Australia and the factors that impact on their personal and professional experiences.

2. Literature review

In the literature, descriptive studies have been conducted internationally to understand the experiences of IENs. These studies categorise the migration experience of IENs in three ways: either positively (Alonso-Garbayo & Maben, 2009), negatively (Brunero, Smith, & Bates, 2008), or as a set of chronological stages of barriers to be overcome during the transition to a new country (Magnusdottir, 2005). Framing the stages of experiences described in the latter have been undertaken in previous integrative reviews from developed countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), Canada and the United States of America (USA). For instance, in an integrative review of the experiences of IENs who migrated to the UK, Nichols & Campbell (2010) reported five themes: *motivation for migration, adapting to British nursing, experiences of first world healthcare, feeling devalued and deskilled and vectors of racial discrimination*. The study reported mainly negative issues of migrating and working in the UK which impacted on IEN job satisfaction and subsequent nurse retention (Nichols & Campbell, 2010). These findings were similar to a Canadian review by Newton et al. (2012) that reported five themes from 21 articles which include: *reasons for and challenges with immigration, cultural displacement, credentialing difficulties and deskilling, discriminatory experiences and strategies of IENs which smoothed transition*. A study conducted by Jose (2011) in the USA on the lived experiences of 20 IENs reported six themes: *dreams of a better life, a difficult journey, a shocking reality, rising above the challenges, feeling and doing better and ready to help others*. The meta-themes from these three studies indicate analogous experiences that are depicted in a sequential manner as they underwent their migration journey.

3. Aim

To review the literature that explores the factors that impact on the personal and professional experience of IENs migrating to Australia.

4. Methods

This review utilises an integrative review framework developed by Whitemore & Knaf (2005), which permits the synthesis of literature from a wide range of sources and diverse methodologies. Integrative reviews are the "broadest type of research review method" that allows the review of qualitative theoretical and empirical studies as well as experimental and non-experimental research studies (Whitemore & Knaf, 2005; p. 546). In integrative reviews, as opposed to other review types, the inclusion of articles with a range of different study methodologies provides a more rounded portrayal of a complex issue (Souza, Silva, & Carvalho, 2010; Torraco, 2005; Whitemore & Knaf, 2005).

4.1. Literature search strategy

A list of relevant terms was compiled and used in the literature search that includes searching qualitative and quantitative research studies. All articles that mentioned nurses or registered nurses (RN's) explicitly were flagged to be screened further in the literature review. Due to the abundance of international literature regarding the nursing workforce and global migration of nurses, over 17,000 citations were initially found on a Google Scholar search. Inclusion criteria were set for articles reporting studies from Australia; published up to and including 2016, written in English and electronically available. The University licensed electronic databases were searched which include: Scopus (includes 100% of Medline coverage); CINAHL; PubMed; Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The literature search was undertaken from early July to December 2016 and the terms used included: "Australia"; "nurs\$"; "background"; "experience"; "health professionals"; "international"; "migrant"; "overseas"; "pathway"; "registered nurse"; "stories"; "training".

A total of 672 citations were found using the parameters in the search strategy. Following the first screening, search results were scanned and irrelevant articles were excluded (n=652). This initial screening process identified 20 articles as potentially eligible, a further 15 articles were added after checking references to undergo another screening. The inclusion criteria were applied to filter out nine articles from the 35, leaving 26 articles. Subsequent in-depth analysis based on whether the studies addressed the research aims, resulted in a final set of eligible articles (n=22) included in this integrative review (Fig. 1) (Moher et al., 2009). All the final eligible articles were reviewed by the research team to ensure rigour and that ongoing fortnightly meetings allowed for inter-rater reliability throughout the review process.

4.2. Data evaluation

The methodological quality of the included studies was appraised and evaluated of their research designs, rigour and methodology used. This is an important step when assessing the quality of articles (Whitemore & Knaf, 2005). The included literature was appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist tool for reviewing qualitative studies and all of the articles scored a high quality rating using the tool (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme [CASP], 2017).

4.3. Data analysis

Based on the Whitemore & Knaf (2005) integrative review methodology, this analysis phase consisted of *data reduction, data presentation and data comparison*. The data reduction refers to the presentation of data to determine the factors which impact on the personal and professional experiences of migrant nurses. Data is presented in a table that covers the factors that impact on the

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