What Skill/Knowledge is Important to a Nursing Professional?

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ABSTRACT

This study employed a survey instrument to investigate the knowledge topics that are important to a nursing professional. We asked 491 nursing professionals and managers in Taiwan what they thought about 47 educational topics. For each topic, the authors asked them how much they had learned about a given topic in their formal education, their current knowledge of the topic, and how important the topic has been in their career. Results indicate each knowledge topic's importance, the amount learned in formal education programs, and the educational knowledge gap. The findings also show the amount currently known, current knowledge gap, and the amount learned (or forgotten) subsequent to education. The survey supports current perceptions about the importance of some topics, but it also highlights topics that are sometimes underemphasized or overemphasized. Efforts to develop nursing curricula or training programs for nursing professionals or students should consider the experience of practitioners in clinics and hospitals. Findings should be useful to hospital training departments and nursing educators in universities and colleges to refine or revise their curriculum design. Nursing professionals and students seeking continuing education will also be able to use the results for selecting courses for career enhancement.

Keywords: *Healthcare System, Nursing Competence, Nursing Curriculum, Nursing Knowledge, Nursing Professional*

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the healthcare system during the past decade has caused many universities and colleges to reconsider their nursing education curricula. The rapid advancement of medical science and technology, the demand for health care reform, and the paradigm shift from disease treatment to wellness and illness prevention and patient-centered care have contributed to the evolution of the role of the professional nurse (America Hospital Association [AHA], 2002; Institute of Medicine, 2001). Despite this transformation, many nursing curricula have

continued to prepare nursing graduates who are better prepared for the demands of yesterday's health care system (Dagget, Butts, & Smith, 2002). For example, nurses have received minimal training for management responsibilities. This gap between educational preparation and the complex requirements of current practice settings leaves nurses unprepared to function effectively (Heller et al., 2004).

Contemporary advancements in medical science and technology have changed the landscape of health and illness. These changes require nurses to master complex information, coordinate a variety of care experiences, use technology for health care delivery, and evaluation nursing outcomes (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2007). The increasingly complex requirements of today's nursing practitioners have been accompanied by demands on nurse educators to look at new ways to facilitate learning in the clinical area. While nurse educators are striving to respond to changes in education, the dichotomy between the topics taught in the class room and what is practiced or experienced on the wards remains a problem (Institute of Medicine, 2001, 2003; Kyrkjebo & Hage, 2005). Nurse educators are taking a critical look at the nursing profession, the education system, and the ways in which nurses are prepared to function in the modern health care environment (Daggett et al., 2002).

The preparation of nursing students for health care in the 21st century requires that programs deliver instruction in the most effective and efficient manner possible (Kemsley & Riegle, 2008; Noble, Miller, & Heckman, 2008). Nursing education must keep pace with these changes and prepare individuals to meet these challenges. Significant changes must occur in both education and practice settings to produce the delivery system desired by all constituents (AACN, 2007). Efforts to develop nursing curricula or training programs for nursing professionals should consider the experience of the practitioners who actually perform the work and define the subject matter that nursing professionals should know. Therefore, the aim of this research project is to investigate what

knowledge topics are important to a nursing professional in the modern health care environment of today and identify the topics for which their education or current knowledge could be improved by a survey of working nurses and nurse educators. The key questions investigated were: how relevant was their formal education in their work? how current is the knowledge level of what was taught? and how important was learned knowledge in their career?

Foundation and Related Work

Nursing education is a complex domain of knowledge; it represents a mixture of theories that have evolved from a variety of disciplines and fields of study and then employed and applied in a variety of health care settings. Historically, several curriculum design models (e.g., Ben-Zur, Yagil, & Spitzer, 1999; Boland, 1998) have been proposed and used to develop nursing curricula: These models focus on the skills and knowledge that nursing professionals traditionally need to learn and know.

Daggett et al. (2002) proposed a curriculum framework for nursing education to implement AACN guidelines. They organized nursing knowledge and skills into six categories: liberal arts education, science foundation for human caring, core nursing knowledge, core nursing competencies, nursing role development, and professional nursing values. Each category contains several sub-knowledge and skill topics. For instance, core nursing knowledge contains health promotion, risk reduction and disease prevention, illness and disease management, information and health care technologies, ethics, human diversity, global health care and health care systems and policy. They argued that the uniqueness of nursing is in the way the basic social and biological sciences are synthesized in functions that promote health.

Nursing programs commonly require some exposure to sociology, psychology, bacteriology, anatomy, physiology, and chemistry, regardless of the breadth or depth of the exposure. Nursing programs in hospital and baccalaureate programs in schools require varying degrees of

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