Reviewer’s report

Title: The effectiveness of web-based and face-to-face continuing education methods on nurses' knowledge about AIDS: A comparative study

Version: 1 Date: 24 February 2009

Reviewer: Greg Ryan

Reviewer’s report:

Abstract
Methods section, 3rd sentence – “one day lecture course” contradicts later statements about it being a 3-hour lecture.

Background section:
- 2nd para, 3rd and 4th sentences – “…face-to-face teaching methods often encourage passive learning…For these reasons…..”.

This is a considerable generalization to make, especially when substantiated by just two references that are almost ten years old. The authors do raise an important idea here though which needs to be addressed more systematically throughout the paper – namely, that a well-designed continuing education program that is based on sound educational principles can result in quality learning experiences and outcomes. Whether online or face-to-face, it is the quality of the design and delivery that is the key to effective learning, regardless of the mode of presentation. There needs to be more discussion of educational principles underlying good design, throughout the paper.

- Sentence 5, same para – “As a result…changing or complementing face-to-face methods.” In what way/s? The reference cited here is also somewhat old.

- 5th para, 1st sentence – “Although many web-based programs have been developed in recent years….” Where? About what? By whom? For which target groups?

- Same para, next sentence – “Thus, little knowledge exists concerning web-based education outcomes….” Do the authors refer here to web-based education in general (which would be a false claim) or is this meant to refer specifically to AIDS education for nurses? Clarification is needed.

Methods section:
Sample and data collection – how was random selection obtained, and how did this process relate to the “inclusion criteria”? What is meant by the “blocking random allocation method”? How was “having the necessary skills” ascertained?
How was reliability of the knowledge questionnaire obtained? What statistical test was used?
The focus of the study is the two different modes of delivery. The authors have provided detail of the similarities in content, but how did the pedagogy of the two conditions compare? More detail is needed (see earlier comments about educational design).

Were course resources available to both groups – eg course readings?
How did the interactivity occur with the face-to-face group – eg the same interactive questions about an HIV patient that were used in the self-study text?
What was the role of the ‘teacher’ in both conditions?
Was the post-test ‘open-book’ – i.e. did the face-to-face group have access to their class notes, and did the online group have access to the online program during the post test?
What was the expected time commitment for the online participants?
What was covered in the 1-day workshop about online programs – how did this relate to the activities in the online AIDS program?
What is the influence of the following factors on the study conclusions:
- same instrument used for pre and post-test
- test-retest within 3 hours for face-to-face group versus one week for web group

Results section:
How was data collected regarding the self-report of hours to complete the online course?
How was the question worded in both groups, that led to the findings regarding taking part in more continuing education using the same method?

Discussion section:
There are additional limitations in the study that should be acknowledged – see relevant earlier questions by reviewer.

Minor Essential Revisions

Abstract

Conclusions section – this is a logical leap and needs to be more consistent with the conclusion section of the main body of the paper

Main body of paper

Background section

- 1st para, 2nd sentence – “In (the) nursing profession….”
- 2nd para, 3rd sentence – “Moreover (delete ‘the’) face-to-face teaching…and disregards problem(s)-solving.” (delete ‘s’)
- 3rd para, 2nd sentence – “Teaching through the web……limitations of (the) face-to-face teaching…(delete ‘the’)”

Methods section
- Sample and data collection sub-section, 2nd last para, 3rd sentence – “Participants were allowed to access.....their own pace(s)...” (delete ‘s’)

Results section
- 1st para, 3rd sentence – what are “internal wards”?
- 3rd para, 1st sentence – “In the web-based group....compared with less (that)...” (should be ‘than’)
- 5th para, last sentence – “There was no significant difference between the two groups in this regard(s)” (delete ‘s’)
- Last sentence in this section – how was this question asked?

Discussion section:
- 1st para, 2nd sentence – “Results suggest that these methods....effective(s)” (delete ‘s’)
- Same para, 3rd sentence – “Our results are consistent (insert ‘with’) those of.....”

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests