Reviewer’s report

Title: New graduate nurses' experiences in a clinical specialty: A follow up study of newcomer perceptions of transitional support

Version: 0 Date: 20 Feb 2017

Reviewer: Souraya Sidani

Reviewer’s report:

The overall topic is of relevance to the nursing professional internationally. As pointed out by the authors, transition has been and still is a challenge. Support programs have been developed and implemented in many countries, with limited empirical evidence on their effectiveness. This paper has the potential to contribute to such, much needed evidence.

The study reported in this paper is part of a larger project that evaluated a transition support program, with a particular focus on nurses' perception and how they change. The aim of the study is broadly stated, making it a bit difficult to tease out whether the evaluation is about the processes or the outcomes of the program, or both, and to clearly understand what the outcomes are. Most concepts mentioned after the aim appear to relate to a process evaluation. Experiences seem to be the outcome (as changes in experiences are explored) but there is no specification of what the experiences are actually about. The authors may want to consider situating the study as a process evaluation of the transition support program. Process evaluations are highly recommended as part of implementation research: provide very useful information on the perception and performance of a program; and can be done using qualitative methods or mixed methods - as was done in this study.

Although the details of the transition support program may have been published elsewhere, it would be important to describe its main components and activities in this paper in order for readers to understand what was exactly investigated and how (e.g. the timing of data collection), and to appreciate the meaning of the findings relative to the program. Similarly, information on the implementation of the program is needed to help in the interpretation of some findings - for example, many nurses' experiences, as reported in the results section, can be easily attributed to an inadequate delivery of the program.

The rationale providing for selecting the time points for data collection is not well articulated: how could 8-10 weeks after commencement of the program be considered 'baseline'? What do the authors mean by 'programmed study days'? what were the rotations about and why were they part of the program?

It would be useful to clarify whether the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was done within or across time points.

It is hard to figure out the concepts that were assessed at each point in time as described in the data collection section and in the results section. There is no definition of the concepts to help
determine the adequacy of the measures and to understand the quantitative findings - e.g. what do 'number of study days received', 'orientation days', and 'confidence' refer to?

What 'group differences' were examined? How do these relate to the stated aims?

The explanation of the process of coding the text responses is a bit confusing: were thematic codes generated first then categorized into positive and negative, as implied in the presentation of results?

What sample was included in the data analysis? About 25% of the original sample dropped out; what were reasons for attrition? Did the dropouts differ from completers? Such differences could explain the beneficial changes reported at post-test (e.g. only those with a favorable or positive experience completed the study). In the absence of such evidence, it may be more meaningful to analyze the data provided by the study completers only (n = 87); otherwise, the baseline data could be biased if those who dropped out had unfavorable or negative perceptions at baseline.

It is more informative to 1) provide the percentage of participants who provided free text responses at each time point, 2) explain how the coding was done, i.e. was it done on the baseline qualitative data first and then the same coding scheme guided the post-program data analysis, in order to ensure consistency in coding, which is necessary to examine change over time; or was the baseline and post-program data sets lumped and analyzed to derive common codes, which were then quantized and compared over time?; 3) clarify what codes / themes were categorized as positive and negative, on what basis, and whether the quantification was done within (i.e. number represented the number of times a code / theme was found in the transcript of each participant) or across (i.e. number represented the number of participants who mentioned a code / theme). This is important to help readers interpret and appreciate the results of quantification and the comparison over time.

The presentation of the qualitative findings could benefit from definitions of the themes and subthemes, as many words were not clear (e.g. what does 'supernumeracy support' mean) and from specification of codes that were considered positive and negative, and presentation of the most illustrative quote (for some quotes, it was difficult to see how they actually illustrate the respective theme / subtheme - e.g. the quote about 'reflection' (p. 10), it was hard to figure out how it reflects understanding clinical capabilities). Most of the explanations of the themes and subthemes appear to relate to the process of implementing the program, suggesting there were deviations or drifts from what the program was anticipated to be - unless these represented the nurses' perceptions at baseline.

Overall, the contribution of the paper cannot be easily discerned in light of 1) lack of a description of the program, 2) lack of details and justification of the methods used; 3) lack of information on the quality of the program implementation - most themes / subthemes and their explanations suggest inadequate or low level of fidelity in delivering the program; and 4) lack of clarity on the goal / type of evaluation done, the concepts explored and measured, and the themes that emerged.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests**
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?
If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal