Reviewer’s report

Title: What establishes an excellent nurse? A focus group and Delphi Panel approach

Version: 1 Date: 17 May 2017

Reviewer: Kathryn Pfaff

Reviewer's report:

I commend the authors on the thorough responses to the reviewers' comments. The manuscript is much improved, particularly with regard to the description of the methods. This is much clearer.

There are still many spelling grammatical errors that require revision. For example, the word, "analytical" is incorrectly spelled in Figure 1. Line 23 "A challenge..." is an incomplete sentence. Line 33 - what is "these"? There are also a number of statements that require citation and referencing. For example, lines 19 to 23 and line 43, "Honours programs are..." require citation. There are many more. I suggest a strong external editorial review.

I am concerned about your assumption that the cultivation of honours programs in nursing necessitates a conceptual definition of an "excellent nurse". One could argue all nursing programs (regular and honours) should strive for producing "excellent nurses". Does this assumption imply that those nurses who do not graduate from honours programs are not excellent or less excellent? I am not sure how to rectify this, other than eliminating this focus on honours programs, and emphasizing the increasing acuity of patients and the complexity of the health care system in which nurses are now required to practice. All nursing programs globally are being challenged to prepare nurses who are equipped to practice safely with accrediting bodies are pushing for increasing the competency of graduating nurses. This work shouldn't fall just on nursing educators. Many programs of nursing and health care institutions include "excellence" as a core value or vision. These ideas might support the need for the important work that you have done.

The literature review is much more robust. The addition of Benner's and others' work on being expert or having expertise is important. You argue a relationship between being expert and being excellence in the literature review. The concept of "expert" is included in the semi-structured interview questions; yet, the findings don't reflect the answers to these questions. I would like to see more explicit discussion of the two concepts, "excellent" and "expert" in the findings and discussion. They are clearly different concepts. According to your study, is there a
relationship? Does your work provide clarity regarding the differences? Look at how you might connect these ideas. I think there is a disconnect here.

Your conclusion includes new ideas that should be reported in the discussion. Please revise the conclusion so that it reflects a summary and wrap-up of the research and its implications.

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

Yes

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

Yes

**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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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

Needs some language corrections before being published
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