Reviewer’s report

Title: "We'll check vital signs only till we finish the school": experiences of student nurses regarding intra-semester clinical placement in Ghana

Version: 0 Date: 08 Aug 2017

Reviewer: Emil Petrusa

Reviewer's report:

This is a qualitative study of student nurses' perceptions regarding an "intra-semester" clinical practicum. Students from years 2, 3 and 4 were sampled following informed consent. Standard procedures were followed for analysis of qualitative analysis. Results indicated that student nurses like the integration of theory and practice, but often find differences between the two. Two days per week was not enough for students to appreciate the impact of their care on patients. Students also felt they were given menial tasks rather than "real work." Many did not feel valued by staff nurses. Authors conclude that a "block system" for clinical work may be better.

Comments to improve the value of the manuscript to readers of BMC Nursing:

* The text is well-written and logically organized. There are a few grammatical changes needed which I assume will be identified during the editorial process.

* Authors frame the study as regarding one nursing school in Ghana. The literature is a place for contributions to theoretical and conceptual understanding, rather than by different schools. Certainly, this curriculum WAS created by the faculty and administration of this one school, but advancement of our understanding about nursing education should focus on important educational issues. Was this intra-semester curricular design unique for nursing education? If so, why did the school think this design would be better? What benefits did they hope students would attain?

* In addition to the geographic location of the school, it will help readers understand the educational context if authors provide a summary of the full 4-year curriculum, including identification of any other clinical placements available or required. Do students have experience with other educational arrangements for clinical practica?
Further, it will be useful to know how many patients staff nurses are responsible for and the kinds of patient problems. This will give readers an idea about the workload of staff nurses.

Please describe the nature of patients in the different clinical placements. One of the findings is about the mismatch between topics in class and patient problems in the clinical setting. In the Discussion section, indicate whether there is anything the school can do to minimize or remove this mismatch.

It would be useful to see the semi-structured interview document and may inform others interested in doing similar work.

Were there different interview questions for individual and group interviews? If yes, please provide the items.

When coding and creating themes, what was the degree of agreement among researchers for the final themes and sub-themes? Did you reach consensus?

Good job describing steps for methodological rigor

Under Findings, please use different headings to indicate which are themes and which are sub-themes.

On page 6, regarding Stress, authors report a student mentioning a "long distance" between the hospital and the school. Give readers a bit more information about this. What is the distance? In other places students mention staying late at the hospital and having difficulty with early classes the next day. This could be due to work shifts, geographical distance or both.

Authors report students said they had trouble studying for the following day's lectures due to late hours at the hospital. What might be solutions to this?

Authors write that students report a "gap" between what they learn in class and what the staff nurses do. What might be some explanations for this beyond "too many patients" offered by the authors? Might some possibilities be good and others bad? What might be solutions to this?

Readers will assume that staff nurses are aware of their responsibility to teach and supervise student nurse. Readers might also assume that staff nurses want to support learning by students. However, students perceive that they are assigned "menial" tasks by staff nurses. Why might this occur? What might be solutions to this perception, including sifting students' judgment that any patient care tasks are menial.

In summary, this is well-designed qualitative cross-sectional study of student nurses' experiences at a single hospital in Ghana. The focus of this article should be shifted to educational issues, consequences and possible solutions rather than on experiences in one school. More information should be provided about the context of this learning, eg overall curriculum, nature of patients' problems in the hospital, patients-to-staff nurse ratio, including anything clinically or educationally unique. For Results, this reviewer recommends that authors comment on the consistency (or not) of perceptions from individual and from group interviews. Finally, authors should offer more potential explanations and solutions for the "negative" perceptions uncovered in their interviews.
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.

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.

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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