

Modeling of Lifelong Learning for Health Care Professionals – Nurses

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Key words: health care professionals; nurse; primary health care; human welfare; lifelong learning; healthiness.

Summary. *Introduction.* The article analyses the situation of lifelong learning of health care professionals, namely nurses, and problems in the context of global public health problems. In order to reach the effective lifelong training of nursing specialists, the qualifications are improved appropriately so that they correspond to the needs of activity and professional competences.

The purpose is to prepare a lifelong learning model for health care professionals, namely nurses, who work in primary health care.

Methods. Literature review, documentation analysis, and the preparation of lifelong learning model were performed.

Results. The essence of the lifelong learning conception proposed by the authors (a healthy lifestyle, longevity of residents, and the assumption of life quality) is a sufficient competence of health care professionals, i.e., nurses, in primary health care. The lifelong learning model for nurses, as a group of health care professionals working in the area of primary health care, is presented, which could be of benefit to the organizers of the health care system, experts, and practitioners who aim at a maximum protection of health of the contemporary society (its each member), emphasizing prevention, healthy lifestyle, and life quality.

Conclusions. In order to reach the effective lifelong learning of nursing specialists and improve qualifications appropriately, which would meet the needs of activity and professional competence, the model of lifelong learning is provided. The essence of this model is methodologically grounded lifelong learning programs, which meet the needs of nurses' qualification development. They have to be created after the evaluation of morbidity rates and identification of the main problems, as well as indication of the needs of nurses' competence development.

Introduction

In Lithuania, the strategy of primary professional training and lifelong learning of health professionals encourages more discussions and is little researched.

The main questions for discussion are as follows: whether this strategy matches the holistic understanding of health; whether the professionals are ready to face the challenges posed by globalization and demographical problems; and whether they are capable of implementing new objectives raised for human and public health service.

At the level of the health care system, an attempt is made to reveal the tendencies of lifelong learning development of all professionals working in the health care system and to project or specify strategic health care aims for all subsystems of the health care system. Nurses comprise the biggest group of health care specialists who work in all subsystems of health care, i.e., in primary, secondary, and tertiary health care.

While implementing the system of health care

professionals' lifelong learning, prevention of diseases is emphasized: the level of consciousness of the society member himself/herself toward his/her health is the strongest motive in fostering healthiness. The analysis of the morbidity rate of 2010 shows that the main problems are visual disturbances, infectious diseases, abnormal posture, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases; their tendency is to increase among children and adults (1). The number of adults with diabetes and asthma is increasing. Infectious diseases remain an important and problematic area in public health care. This means that lifelong learning programs in 2011 for nurses working in primary health care should be oriented toward the development of nurses' competences in the following main areas: propagation of a healthy lifestyle (promotion of physical activity and a healthy diet and prevention of addictions); prevention of infectious diseases; and training of people with diabetes (2, 3). The analysis of events for raising the qualification of nurses working in the area of primary

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health care reveals the tendency that there are no programs suggested for propagation of a healthy lifestyle, physical activity, and a healthy diet, prevention of addictions and infectious diseases, or development of competences of training people with diabetes.

More effective training and lifelong learning of nurses as health care professionals is possible only after matching global and regional needs of problem solving in public health care (4).

The problems of lifelong learning of nursing professionals comprise the interaction of needs and aims and resources, such as finances, staff, technologies, management schemes, information, experience, and knowledge (5). It is important to evaluate health problems and follow the global practice and principles of harmonious development, which involve all areas of the society.

The aim of this paper was to prepare a model of lifelong learning for health care professionals, namely nurses, who work in primary health care.

Methods

Literature review was performed to prepare a model of lifelong learning for health care professionals (nurses) who work in primary health care. The model of lifelong learning is proposed, which is grounded on the holistic conception of healthiness and the principles of maintenance and improvement of health.

Documentation analysis is applied for the analysis of health care in regulating documents (the legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania).

The model for lifelong learning is provided, the essence of which is comprised of methodologically grounded continuing education programs, which correspond to the needs of nurses' qualification improvement. The programs should be created after the evaluation of morbidity rates and identification of the main problems, as well as the needs for development of nurses' competences.

The Concept of Human Welfare in the Context of Harmonious Society Development

In the *White Book of Science and Technology in Lithuania* (in Lithuanian, *Lietuvos mokslo ir technologijų baltoji knyga*), the key aim of the state is claimed to be "the development of a person and the society" (6). The development of a person means the strengthening of person's powers by education and health care and creating conditions for power use. While describing the concept of personal well-being, Schultz distinguishes the following main aspects: improvement of residents' healthiness, personal education in the family and at school, and professional training and system of constant education (7). Bell claims that the condition of postindustrial

society development comprises two aspects: health of the society (ensuring and maintenance of health, which influence the processes of recovery and demographic growth) and education (8).

Healthiness of the state is very closely related to its competitiveness (ability to withstand external threats and to protect its market) not only in the area of business, but also in the areas of health care, social care, education, science, and technology. In the concept of personal well-being, personal responsibility is especially emphasized, which can help in ensuring global harmony and abundance (9). Nowadays, an attempt is made to attract the attention of people, especially of those working in the health care system, to the fact that the world is ill (in the broad sense), and one of the main objectives is to restore and ensure its healthiness. An important condition is for people to understand that they have to take responsibility for their own health.

The matching needs of economics, development of the society, and environment protection influence the ensuring of person's life quality, well-being of the society, and security (10). This corresponds to the principles of harmonious society development. The concept of harmonious development, the importance of knowledge, and its practical application increase in all spheres of life. Harmonious development is a long-term and constant development of the society, the aim of which is to ensure good life conditions for the present, as well as future, generations in all areas of social life all over the world and in each country separately, compromising between environmental, economic, and social aims of the society. The principles of harmonious development are especially important in the activities of public health care specialists. This is apparently emphasized by the definition of public health suggested by Winslow and confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO): "Public health is as the science and art of disease prevention, prolonging life, and promoting health and well-being through organized community effort for the sanitation of the environment, the control of communicable infections, the organization of medical and nursing services for the early diagnosis and prevention of disease, the education of the individual in personal health and the development of the social machinery to assure everyone a standard of living adequate for the maintenance or improvement of health" (11).

The activities of nurses who work in primary health care focus on prevention, the main aim of which is the strengthening of public health, prevention of diseases, and implementation of control. In this context, the main feature of nurses' activities is the concentration of attention on the well-being of physical, mental, and social health in the society (12). Well-being is achieved by helping the person

to take care and maintain social, mental, and physical health and, in this way, to achieve better quality of life. The person has optimal possibilities to be in the society, participate in life, work, and realize himself/herself only when he/she has a sufficiently good physical, mental, and social health (13). As the society is better informed about health questions, accordingly, it expects more from the specialists working in the health care system. The quality of nurses' activity is influenced by their knowledge about the areas of society life, which have a direct influence on people's health: economics, ecology, social care, education, etc. Personal health problems should be solved in a complex and integrated way. This requires another especially significant competence of the nurses: working in a team.

In conclusion, the purposeful lifelong learning of nursing specialists working in primary health care is an important condition for their professional competence.

Situation of Lithuanian Residents' Healthiness and its Problems

Residents' health depends on many factors and health determinants. Poor health does not happen accidentally or because of bad luck. The main factors influencing health are as follows (14): genetic and biological factors (20%), lifestyle and behavior (50%), environment (20%), and health care (10%). Differences (inequality) in residents' health are conditioned by social and economic conditions (poverty, unemployment, unsuitable accommodation, stressful or dangerous working conditions, pollution, and lack of social support) and characteristics of behavior and lifestyle (smoking, nutrition, or physical activity). The activity of health improvement, which comprises many spheres of life in the society, is called public health (15). Public health is oriented toward the strengthening of health of all residents; "blaming the victim" point of view is not common for it as people cannot be responsible for the actions, which they cannot manage.

Statistical data on the residents' morbidity in Lithuania is provided by the information system SVEIDRA of the Compulsory Health Insurance Fund (1). According to the data, in 2010, the number of patients having one or more diseases insignificantly decreased compared with 2009. However, infectious diseases remain an important issue in public health. In 2010, the Centre for Communicable Diseases and AIDS registered more than 600 000 infectious or parasitic diseases (184 diseases per 1000 residents). In 2010, morbidity due to tuberculosis increased by 18.8% in children (0–17 years old): 120 cases were registered or 19.3 per 100 000 children.

One of the most exceptional features of the

contemporary public health is that the whole society, its structures and people, are responsible for their own and other individuals' health, as well as are active participants in the solving of health problems. This integrated concept is called *new public health*. The contemporary concept of the new public health formed because of the rising wave of health strengthening movement and because of the scientific proof that the main public health problems cannot be resolved only in the medical sector (16, 17). As health is a broad and complex concept, health strengthening is not a simple activity as well. The processes of health strengthening comprise the following aspects:

- Promotion of a healthy lifestyle;
- Improvement of accessibility of health services;
- Creation of the environment in which a healthy choice becomes the easiest choice;
- Education about health preservation and maintenance.

Education on health care is the most important way of strengthening health. Its aim is to develop behavior and point of view toward the values, which form the background for a healthy lifestyle not only for separate individuals, but also for the whole society. Education on health care is defined as a conscious activity of transmitting knowledge including some communication forms, the aim of which is to increase understanding about health and develop the skills of lifestyle related to the health of a person and the society (18).

Tannahill distinguishes 7 areas of health strengthening (19):

1. Prevention of diseases (e.g., preventive check-up);
2. Preventive education on health care (e.g., to motivate people to lead a healthier lifestyle);
3. Preventive health protection (e.g., safety rules, water fluoridation, etc.);
4. Education on health protection (e.g., lobbying on legitimization of wearing a seatbelt);
5. Education on health care (e.g., education on healthy lifestyle skills);
6. Health protection (e.g., prohibition to smoke in the workplace);
7. Education on protection of health (e.g., the attempt to prohibit alcohol advertisements).

Based on these activities, it is possible to provide the model of strengthening of health, which highlights the main areas of activity: prevention of diseases, education on health care, and protection of health (Fig. 1).

In the Standard of Lithuanian Health Terms and Definitions (20), education on health care is defined as an activity of health care institutions, the aim of which is to educate different resident groups on health protection and strengthening. Other means of health strengthening are resources and norms (laws,

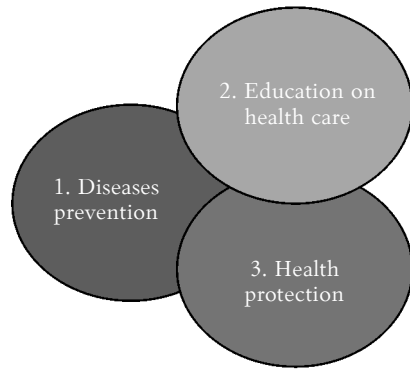


Fig. 1. Areas of health strengthening activities
Adapted from Tannahil (19).

acts, orders, and rules). Education on health care is based on the principle of personal and social voluntariness, while norms require obeying the approved rules and are effective only when they are applied with control and penalties (21). Health strengthening can also be viewed as a complex of principles to orient the activities of health, while affecting inequality and encouraging cooperation and participation. Therefore, health care specialists, including nursing specialists, have to understand clearly what health is, what aspect of health they strengthen, and the ways that affect health in a broader way rather than individual behavior.

Nowadays, the mission of the new public health is to reach the desired residents' health and eliminate health inequalities with the organized efforts of institutions and the society (22). The condition of contemporary society is determined by lifestyles, environment, heredity, and the health care system. In the globalization process, the dissemination of threats to health is becoming a universal object of health as science and practice.

Lifelong Learning of Nurses Working in Primary Health Care

New technologies and management methods, as well as international cooperation, contribute to ensuring the quality of health care system. However, despite these means, the evolution of health problems cannot be avoided. Integration to the EU economic space provides the Lithuanian health care system with technological and financial resources and new experience, which is important to use adequately; however, it is equally important to improve lifelong learning of health care specialists who would ensure constant maintenance of their competences.

One of the possibilities to keep up with the scientific, cultural, and technological development of the society is to save their qualification and constantly improve their professional knowledge, skills, and competences. Therefore, the main aim is the

strengthening of interaction of lifelong learning with professional activities and working environment.

The document of the Ministry of Education and Science "Development of Possibilities of Adults' Continuous Learning in the Context of Lifelong Learning Strategy Implementation" (2004) claims that lifelong learning of adults has not been sufficiently developed in Lithuania yet. This statement is grounded on the following tendencies: education policy of adults is not sufficiently formed as only a small part of adults participate in the lifelong learning programs; the qualification of a part of them does not correspond to the requirements of the market; there is a lack of purposeful teaching programs; and the qualification improvement system is not developed sufficiently compared with the developed EU states (23).

Jarvis notes that education of adults is necessary to their adaptation to new spheres in the future and a necessary condition when new technologies appear and quick changes take place (24). Therefore, the development of lifelong learning of adults is an important condition for the state progress.

The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning states that there are two important reasons why it is essential to implement lifelong learning (25):

- Europe approaches a knowledge-based society and economy. More than ever, the accessibility to the newest information and knowledge and motivation and skills to use these resources wisely personally and by all the society become a factor, which increases competitiveness in Europe, people efficiency, and applicability.
- Contemporary Europeans live in a socially and politically complicated world. More than ever, they want to plan their life. Active social participation is expected from them. They have to learn to live under the conditions of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic variety. Education in its broad sense is the most important thing while learning and understanding how to face these challenges.

Lifelong learning realizes the conception of lifelong learning. In the contemporary society, the need for new knowledge is significantly increasing; thus, lifelong learning is becoming increasingly important for health care specialists themselves, as well as for the state, communities, and organizations because knowledge and attitudes condition their improvement and well-being. Thus, the improvement and development of lifelong learning of public health care specialists gain a special significance in Lithuania.

Consequently, the mission of lifelong learning from the point of view of education is to create possibilities for personal self-realization; however, the priority is provided for ensuring nurses' success in professional activities and their workplace, which is unrelated to social, physical, and mental health well-being.

Health care and health education interrelate especially clearly in the professional area of nurses working in primary health care. This is exhibited in such activities as confidential consultations, implementation of teaching programs related to health problems, planning, coordination, and implementation of health strengthening strategies, maintaining relationship with other organizations, or provision of help and information (26, 27). According to Groot et al., health and education are two most important investments into human capital, while education on a healthy lifestyle is a factor, which significantly influences the well-being of each person (28).

The analysis of morbidity rates in 2010 revealed visual disturbances, infectious diseases, abnormal posture, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases as the main problems, which tend to increase among adults and children. This means that the lifelong learning events of nurses working in primary health care in 2011 should be oriented toward the development of nurses' competences in these main areas (29):

- Propagation of a healthy lifestyle (encouragement of physical activity and a healthy diet, prevention of addictions, etc.);
- Prevention of infectious diseases;
- Education of people with diabetes.

Qualification development programs of health specialists are provided by the Ministry of Health. In fact, 285 programs are offered for various target groups (public health specialists, nurses, doctors, paramedics, doctors odontologists, oral care specialists, psychiatrists, psychiatrists of children and teenagers, psychologists, social workers, family doctors, general practice nurses, nursing administrators, obstetricians, emergency workers, pharmacists, and neurologists). The analysis and generalization of the qualification development programs of public health specialists provided by the Ministry of Health allow stating that it is possible to recognize the competence toward which the qualification development program is directed and to evaluate whether these programs correlate with the needs of qualification development of nurses working in primary health care.

The events organized and devoted to the qualification development of nurses working in primary health care in 2011 are presented in Table. However, there are no topics devoted to promotion of a healthy lifestyle, physical activity, and a healthy diet, prevention of addictions, prophylaxis of infectious diseases, and development of education competences of people with diabetes.

In order to ensure the quality of health care services, it is necessary to indicate the needs of nurses' professional development. The most important element seems to be nurse's competences in evaluating

Table. Events Devoted to Qualification Improvement of Nurses Working in the Area of Primary Health Care (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania*)

Topic of the Event	No. of Hours
Teamwork in the ambulatory health care system	60
Prevention of patients and its assurance	24
Conflict management and communication with patients	16
Children and adolescents' health: problems and possibilities of solving them in the activities of nurses	32
Mental health and patients' nursing	40
Modernization possibilities of rehabilitation services: interdisciplinary approach	40
Overcoming stress and crises	40
Tactics of actions in case of suicide and violence	8
Decision-aimed counseling in the system of ambulatory mental health care	60
Practical aspects of trauma and acute states and their assistance	36
Patient rights and their assurance in nursing practice	16

*http://www.sam.lt/go.php/Sveikatos_sistemas_specialistai

the needs of qualification development and choosing the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities (30). Real needs of nurses should be the basis in the preparation of lifelong learning and qualification-improving programs and in organization of lifelong learning of nurses.

In order to reach effective lifelong learning of nursing and adequately improved qualifications, which would correspond to the needs of activity and specialist competence, a lifelong learning model is provided (Fig. 2).

The essence of the model is methodologically grounded lifelong learning programs, which correspond to the needs of improving nurses' qualification. They have to be created after the evaluation of morbidity rates, identification of the main problems, and establishment of the needs of nurses' competence development.

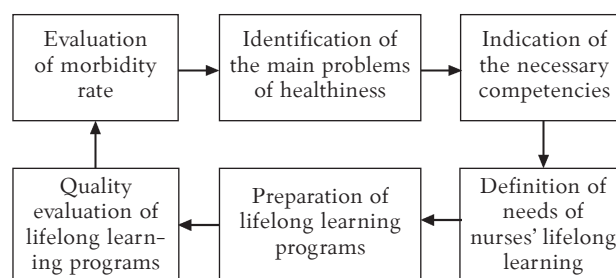


Fig. 2. The lifelong learning model of nurses working in primary health care (Sajienė and Vetrenkienė)

Conclusions

The principles of human welfare and harmonious development of the society are especially important in the professional activity of health care professionals, including nurses. The main feature of nursing activity is concentration of attention on physical, mental, and social health and well-being of the society.

In the professional area of nurses working in primary health care, the interrelationship between health care and health education is very important. This is manifested in such activities as confidential consultations, implementation of programs related to personal health problems, planning, coordination, and implementation of health strengthening strategies, maintaining relationship with other organizations, and provision of help and information.

Purposeful lifelong learning of primary health care nurses is an essential condition for assuring

professional competence.

The events of lifelong learning of nurses working in primary health care should be more oriented toward the development of nurses' competences in promotion of a healthy lifestyle (promotion of physical activity and a healthy diet and prevention of addictions), prophylaxis of infectious diseases, and education of people with diabetes.

In order to reach effective lifelong learning of nurses and improve their qualification appropriately, the model of lifelong learning is provided; the model is methodologically grounded on lifelong learning programs based on the evaluation of morbidity rates and identification of the main health problems of population, as well as indication of the needs of nurses' competence development.

Statement of Conflict of Interest

The authors state no conflict of interest.

Sveikatos priežiūros specialistų – slaugytojų tęstinio mokymosi modeliavimas

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Raktažodžiai: sveikatos priežiūros specialistai, slaugytojas, pirminė sveikatos priežiūra, žmogaus gerovė, tęstinis mokymasis, sveikatingumas.

Santrauka. Įvadas. Straipsnyje analizuojama sveikatos priežiūros specialistų – slaugytojų, dirbančių pirminės sveikatos priežiūros srityje, tęstinio mokymosi situacija ir globalios visuomenės sveikatos problemos. Siekiant efektyvaus slaugos specialistų tęstinio mokymosi, reikalinga nuolat kelti kvalifikaciją, kuri atitiktų veiklos ir specialistų kompetentingumo poreikius. Straipsnyje pateikiamas sveikatos priežiūros specialistų – slaugytojų tęstinio mokymosi modelis. *Tikslas* – parengti sveikatos priežiūros specialistų – slaugytojų, dirbančių pirminėje sveikatos priežiūroje, tęstinio mokymosi modelį.

Metodai. Mokslinės literatūros ir dokumentų analizė ir tęstinio mokymosi modelio parengimas.

Rezultatai. Autorių siūlomos tęstinio mokymosi koncepcijos esmė – sveiko gyvenimo būdo, gyventojų ilgaamžiškumo ir gyvenimo kokybės prielaida, kuri paremta pakankama sveikatos priežiūros specialistų kompetencija pirminėje sveikatos priežiūroje. Pateikiamas sveikatos priežiūros specialistų grupės – slaugytojų, dirbančių pirminės sveikatos priežiūros srityje, tęstinio mokymosi modelis galėtų padėti sveikatos apsaugos sistemos organizatoriams, ekspertams ir praktikams, kuriems rūpi išsaugoti visuomenės sveikatą, atsižvelgiant į prevencinį darbą, sveiką gyvenimo būdą ir gyvenimo kokybę.

Išvados. Siekiant efektyvaus slaugos specialistų tęstinio mokymosi, reikalinga nuolat kelti kvalifikaciją, kuri atitiktų veiklos ir specialistų kompetentingumo poreikius. Pateikto tęstinio mokymosi modelio esmė – metodologiškai pagrįstos, slaugytojų kvalifikacijos kėlimo poreikius atitinkančios tęstinio mokymosi programos. Tokios programos turi būti kuriamos įvertinus gyventojų sergamumo rodiklius, identifikavus pagrindines problemas ir nustačius slaugytojų kompetencijų plėtros poreikius.

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