

Student Nurses' Assessment of Pedagogical Atmosphere on the Ward During Practical Placement at a University Hospital in Lithuania

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Key words: pedagogical atmosphere; practical placement; clinical learning environment; student nurses; CLES; Lithuania.

Summary. Background. The achievement of student nurses' learning outcomes in a clinical setting will depend not only on the mentor's and student's approach toward clinical training, but also on organizational features of an institution where practical placement is based and on readiness of the whole unit to teach and assess a student by creating a positive pedagogical atmosphere.

The aim of the study was to assess a pedagogical atmosphere of practical placement as the dimension of a clinical learning environment for student nurses at a university hospital in Lithuania.

Material and Methods. Student nurses (from year 1 to year 4) from Vilnius University, Vilnius College, and Utena College, who had their practical placement at a university hospital, took part in the anonymous survey from January 2012 to May 2013.

A clinical learning environment scale was used in a web-based version. The instrument was translated into Lithuanian and piloted during one of the previous studies within the international project (2003–2005).

Results. Near half (42.1%) of the study participants expressed their satisfaction with the recently completed period of their practical placement, and 29.0% were very satisfied. Student nurses' satisfaction with clinical placement was not related to their age and year of education ($P=0.060$). The overall assessment of pedagogical atmosphere on the ward positively correlated with the duration of practical placement ($r=0.161$, $P<0.01$). The majority of the student nurses were supervised by a registered nurse ($N=168$) and a ward manager ($N=147$) during clinical training. Student nurses mostly estimated their individual input into clinical training as high ($N=158$) or very high ($N=105$).

Conclusions. The possibility to refer to staff and a positive atmosphere in the unit was rated at the highest level by student nurses. Students who noticed the highest individual input to their clinical training evaluated clinical learning environment at the best. A longer duration of clinical training correlated with better ratings of pedagogical atmosphere on the ward. Students reported to have benefited most from being supervised by an individual mentor.

Introduction

The most appropriate way for students to learn what it means to be professional is to see this in action (1). Modern university studies are characterized by particular theoretical knowledge, their broadness and fundamentality, although greater focus on the development of practical skills and competencies is lacking. It is recognized that generally in Lithuania relations between higher educational institutions (HEIs) and working life are still weak, and employers are not involved enough into planning, organization, and evaluation of students' practical learning and teaching as all HEIs manage this process according to their resources and capacities (2). Such traditions of professional training slow down suc-

cessful preparation of graduates for a professional career.

The recent development of nursing studies in HEIs in Lithuania indicates the tendencies of change in programs and their delivery with emphasis on the quality of practice. The emerging shortage of nurses points to the importance of a continued supply of sufficient numbers and competencies of new graduates to sustain the health care system into the future (3).

Training of student nurses in a clinical learning environment is characterized by a triple communication process or a partnership approach (1), where a student, a theory teacher, and a mentor – a clinical team – have a close relationship in seeking an effec-

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tive interaction between theory and practice. So, the traditional faculty's role of primary supervision of students has changed to that of facilitating and supporting the mentor who, in turn, has taken greater responsibility for student learning (4). Role modelling in nursing concerns learning in the practice environment and is often implicitly taught by example, with students unconsciously modelling nurses' practice (1). Through experience as a team member, students become more skillful in organizing work, communicating with others, practicing with greater independence, and identifying and requesting learning opportunities. This proves that collaboration and partnership between a nursing institution and nursing practice is of utmost importance for students' learning in clinical placements (5).

The impact of students' satisfaction with clinical training is much bigger than just a positive evaluation of their experience or students' achievement of practice outcomes. Students' experience of placements and mentors serves as a reason for staying or leaving the nursing program when, for early leavers, poor placement experience may be the point at which they decide to leave and which is clearly a factor in their attrition (6).

In Lithuania, several studies have been conducted in the field of health care students' clinical training. The relationship between a student and a mentor, students' attitudes toward their clinical training and support from their mentor, connection between a psychosocial environment and achievement of the practical training objectives in the practical training settings have been investigated (7–9). In this study, we employed a systematic approach to student nurses' practical training using a standardized research instrument to evaluate the most important dimensions of clinical training: pedagogical atmosphere on the ward, supervisory relationships, leadership style of ward managers, and premises of nursing. In this paper, we report on the results of student nurses' assessment of pedagogical atmosphere on the ward during practical placement at a university hospital in Lithuania.

Background

A decade ago, the strategic reorganization of nursing education in Lithuania was linked to the implementation of the directive 2005/36/EC (10) and resembled 2 steps of entry (instead of the previous so-called "medical schools") into the nursing profession providing higher nonuniversity nursing education (3.5 years) and university nursing education (4 years). At the moment, 3 universities and 6 colleges provide undergraduate study programs of nursing in Lithuania. In nursing education, for more than 15 years already, nursing students are exclusively taught by nurses academically qualified as

nursing faculty. After completion of undergraduate studies, new educated nurses can directly enter the health care workforce taking the duties of general practice nurses.

Practical training takes half of the study time in nursing. Nurse students make their clinical training in the largest hospitals, primary health care centers, or nursing and supportive treatment hospitals increasingly under the supervision of qualified mentors. Literature sources suggest that enhanced communication and consultative processes between practice nurses and universities lead to more positive outcomes for all stakeholders (11). Therefore, the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences has taken the responsibility to enhance training of qualified mentors for student nurses in practice through the continuing professional development program "Mentorship in Nursing" (36 contact hours), delivered by the Postgraduate Study Centre of the University since 2009. However, a closer relationship between program providers, student nurses, and working life is especially important and necessary.

Material and Methods

Instrument. Student nurses' clinical learning environment during practical placement at university hospital settings was evaluated using the Clinical Learning Environment and Supervision (CLES) scale (12). This instrument was double translated into Lithuanian and validated during the project of Thematic European Nursing Network (2003–2005) (13).

Students filled out the web-based version of the questionnaire using the CLES scale within the framework of the Empowering Professionalization of Nurses through Mentorship (EmpNURS) project (2010–2013) (14). In the Optima system, a special link to this data subset was created.

The CLES scale has its focus on the evaluation of the learning experience of student nurses in clinical placements. This scale consists of 43 statements and is structured by 4 subdimensions: 1) pedagogical atmosphere on the ward, 2) supervisory relationships, 3) leadership style of ward managers, and 4) premises of nursing. The statements were offered on a 5-step continuum scale: 1, fully disagree; 2, disagree; 3, neither agree nor disagree/neutral; 4, agree; and 5, fully agree. In this article, we report on the study data that relate to a pedagogical atmosphere of clinical learning environment experienced by student nurses on the ward at a university hospital in Lithuania.

Participants. Student nurses (N=319; response rate, 84%) (from year 1 to year 4) who had their practical placement at a university hospital took part in the anonymous survey organized from January 2012 to May 2013. The important inclusion criterion was the duration of recently accomplished

practical placement that had to be 1 week or longer.

Ethical permission to conduct the study was issued by the Centre of Bioethics at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (17-01-2012 No. BC-KS (M)-133).

Statistical data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 21. An approach of descriptive statistics to calculate the means of variables with 95% CI was applied. Normal distribution of the data was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Because of abnormality of the data, nonparametric tests for 2 and more than 2 independent samples (Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney) were used to analyze the differences between groups and test the relationship with different factors. To determine statistically significant differences between groups of sociodemographic characteristics, the χ^2 criterion was applied. The Spearman correlation analysis was used to test the interrelationship between interval measures. $P < 0.05$ was considered significant.

Results

The sample of this study consisted mostly of female student nurses in their second to the fourth year of study with different unit distribution of their practical placement. The majority (89.0%) of the students undertook their clinical training at hospital units while the others, in community settings. According to the duration, the longest practical placement was 7 weeks (40.4%) or 5 weeks (32.3%) (Table 1).

Almost half (42.1%) of the study participants expressed their satisfaction with the recently com-

pleted period of their practical placement, 29.0% were very satisfied, and 19.3% neither dissatisfied nor satisfied along with those very or rather dissatisfied (9.7%). Student nurses' overall satisfaction with clinical placement was not related to their age and year of education ($P = 0.060$).

Assessment of Pedagogical Atmosphere on the Ward. The study results revealed that the highest scores in assessment of pedagogical atmosphere were given by student nurses to the items about easy approach of staff members (4.41 points out of 5) and a positive atmosphere in the unit (4.11 points out of 5). The opportunity to take part in discussions during staff meetings was rated at the lowest level (2.03 points). The overall assessment of pedagogical atmosphere on the ward positively correlated with the duration of practical placement ($r = 0.161$, $P < 0.01$). Longer practical placement periods were related to a more positive students' evaluation of pedagogical atmosphere during their clinical training (Table 2).

A statistically significant difference in the evaluation of pedagogical atmosphere was determined between student nurses in their second and fourth year of education, with the fourth-year students being the most critical. The students of the second year more often than their counterparts from the last study year reported that staff members were easy to approach; they felt comfortable going to the unit at the beginning of their shift, and experienced a positive atmosphere on the ward. In total, the students of the second year more positively rated all the aspects of pedagogical atmosphere in the unit ($P < 0.05$) except for being comfortable when taking part in the discussions during staff meetings ($P > 0.05$). A statistical difference in the ratings between the student nurses in the third and the fourth year of studies was also revealed. Many of the aspects were more positively evaluated by the third-year student nurses, except for an easy approach of staff members, feeling comfortable going to the unit at the beginning of the shift, and taking part in the discussions during staff meetings.

This study showed that the majority of the student nurses were supervised by a registered nurse ($N = 168$) and a ward manager ($N = 147$) during their clinical training. Although student nurses supervised by a registered nurse rated pedagogical atmosphere in the ward better, there was no statistically significant difference between the groups of students supervised by different mentors ($P > 0.05$). According to the model of supervision of student nurses – group or individual – students with an individual mentor rated the overall educational atmosphere on the ward, as well as most of its aspects, significantly better ($P < 0.05$) (Table 3).

Student nurses estimated their individual input into clinical training mostly as high ($N = 158$)

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents According to their Sociodemographic Characteristics (N=319)

Sociodemographic Characteristic	Frequency (%)	
Gender	Male	3.4
	Female	96.6
Age (years)	<25	90.9
	25–44	8.5
	45+	0.6
Year of education	First	0.3
	Second	30.1
	Third	41.4
	Fourth	28.2
Unit of practical placement	Surgical	32.6
	Medical	19.4
	Psychiatric	10.3
	Gynecologic	5.3
	Children	4.4
	Other	27.9
Duration of practical placement (in weeks)	One	0.9
	Two	7.2
	Three	17.9
	Four	0.3
	Five	32.3
	Six	0.9
	Seven	40.4

Table 2. Assessment of Pedagogical Atmosphere on the Ward and Its Relationship With Duration of Practical Placement

Pedagogical Atmosphere on the Ward	Mean	SD	Duration of Placement	
			<i>r</i> *	<i>P</i>
Members of the staff were easy to approach	4.41	0.75	-0.045	0.423
I felt comfortable going to the unit at the start of my shift	4.04	0.85	0.001	0.983
During staff meetings (e.g., before shifts) I felt comfortable taking part in the discussions	2.03	1.04	0.053	0.348
There was a positive atmosphere on the unit	4.15	0.82	0.150	0.007
Staff members were generally interested in student supervision	3.87	0.91	0.137	0.014
The staff learned to know the students by their personal names	4.07	0.91	0.200	<0.001
There were sufficient meaningful learning situations on the unit	4.11	0.90	0.185	0.001
Learning situations were multidimensional in terms of content	4.03	0.89	0.213	<0.001
The unit can be regarded as a good learning environment	4.07	0.83	0.168	0.003

*Spearman correlation coefficient.

Table 3. Assessment of Pedagogical Atmosphere on the Ward by Student Nurses According to Organizational Characteristics of Practical Placement

Organizational Characteristics of Practical Placement		N	Pedagogical Atmosphere on the Ward			
			Mean	SD	95% CI	
					Lowest Boundary	Highest Boundary
Supervisor	Ward manager	147	3.88	0.60	3.7869	3.9841
	Registered nurse	168	3.89	0.65	3.7536	3.9524
Supervisory model	Group	162	3.80	0.63	3.71	3.90
	Individualized	130	4.03*	0.57	3.93	4.13
	Other else	10	3.67	0.63	3.22	4.13
	Any supervisor	17	3.23	0.44	3.00	3.46
Student's individual input (out of 5 points)	3	47	3.48	0.64	3.29	3.67
	4	158	3.82	0.59	3.73	3.92
	5	105	4.15	0.48	4.06	4.25

**P*<0.05 in comparison with the group supervision model.

or very high (N=105). As no statistical difference between input groups and evaluation of pedagogical atmosphere on the ward was determined, the correlation analysis revealed a weak although positive relationship between students' assessment of pedagogical atmosphere and their individual input to their practical placement and satisfaction with placement. Students with greater individual input to their own clinical training and more satisfied with the practical period were more likely to assess a pedagogical atmosphere positively (*r*=0.377, *P*<0.001 and *r*=0.654, *P*<0.001, respectively) (Table 3).

Individually supervised student nurses reported their higher assessment for 7 out of 9 characteristics of pedagogical atmosphere on the ward. Those student nurses more often felt a positive atmosphere, were comfortable going to the unit at the beginning of the shift, and met the staff who learned to know the students by their personal names and were generally interested in students' supervision (Table 4).

Student nurses provided with an individual mentor rated all the aspects of pedagogical atmosphere

on the ward better in comparison with those students who noted that they had no supervision at all and worked with all staff members in the unit (*P*<0.05).

Discussion

Previously, traditional mentoring of student nurses used to imply only group supervision and less formal practical training. Nowadays, in nursing programs in Lithuania, an individual supervision approach is started to be applied during clinical placement, which provides students with a permanent mentor during training in practice. The study results reveal that still much has to be done to reach this goal of one-to-one supervision as almost half of the respondents felt being supervised in a group or even reported to have not been supervised at all. A systematic review of studies that measure the effectiveness of mentoring as a knowledge translation intervention found that mentoring through individual meetings or using a combination of individual and group meetings improved most outcomes and enhanced practitioners' outcomes as well (15). A

Table 4. Assessment of Pedagogical Atmosphere on the Ward by Student Nurses According to Supervision Model During Practical Placement

Pedagogical atmosphere on the ward	Supervision Model	Mean Rank*	<i>P</i>
Staff members were easy to approach	Group	148.25	0.653
	Individual	144.32	
I felt comfortable going to the unit at the start of my shift	Group	136.88	0.020
	Individual	158.49	
During staff meetings (e.g., before shifts) I felt comfortable taking part in the discussions	Group	146.42	0.984
	Individual	146.60	
There was a positive atmosphere on the unit	Group	134.26	0.003
	Individual	161.75	
Staff members were generally interested in student supervision	Group	131.40	<0.001
	Individual	165.31	
The staff learned to know the students by their personal names	Group	130.99	0.000
	Individual	165.83	
There were sufficient meaningful learning situations on the unit	Group	135.77	0.009
	Individual	159.87	
The learning situations were multidimensional in terms of content	Group	135.24	0.007
	Individual	160.53	
The unit can be regarded as a good learning environment	Group	132.54	0.001
	Individual	163.90	

*Mann-Whitney *U* test, comparison of ranks in 2 groups.

Finish study emphasized that for mentors, it was essential to spend enough time with nursing students during their clinical practice in order to ensure the proper assessment of students' behavior (16).

In literature, different aspects of student nurses' clinical training are discussed, from a different perspective, and under various models of practical training. However, students' individual input in their practical learning is underemphasized. This study showed that the students with greater individual input to their own clinical training and more satisfied with the practical period were more likely to assess pedagogical atmosphere positively. Other researchers report that, despite strong willingness of nurses to mentor students in a general practice setting, nursing students are often perceived to be underprepared for their clinical placement (11).

Further investigations and discussions are necessary concerning the factors and circumstances that may, and to what extent, influence the student nurses' input into their learning in clinical environment.

Our findings confirmed that individually supervised student nurses' pedagogical atmosphere on the ward overall and most of its aspects scored higher in comparison with the group models of supervision. For achieving the goal of the individual supervision model for student nurses in Lithuania, a proper analysis of such opportunities is important as many organizational factors influence the adjustment of nurses' duties and routine nursing care in the unit with students coming for clinical training. Organizational and/or cultural influences, if such dominate, lead to unintentional learning and

compromised supervision of students, as this may be rushed because of high preference for patients and limit time to students' mentoring (1). Another obstacle, according to Williamson et al. (2013), that would be also consistent with the Lithuanian situation, involves clinical pressures and short staffing, which explains apparent unwillingness of some nurses to carry out the role of the mentor (6).

To increase the overall quality of student nurses' clinical training, we would suggest Lithuanian HEIs to consider the rational implementation of dedicated education units or the learning ward approach as an example and experience of several EU countries (Finland, Portugal, and the Netherlands). Evidence suggests that students report the quality of the unit's learning environment, the leadership style of the nurse manager, and the nursing care on the unit as more favorable in dedicated education units than traditional units (17). Such a unit model differs from traditional clinical education in the roles of faculty and nurses, the routines that support integration of students into the unit's workflow, and how the units are selected. Because students are assigned to patients, they may work with different nurses each day still feeling personally supervised and strongly supported.

Finally, the use of CLES and its follow-up validation was an added value of this study. We confirmed the CLES scale to be a workable tool to provide the evidence about student nurses' opinion and satisfaction with clinical learning environment. Such evidence is a source for a practical placement evaluation and nursing program improvements both for educators and clinical managers. With CLES,

student nurses feel the attention and respect to their feedback and have a possibility to actively participate in the self-assessment process of current nursing programs.

Recommendations. The recommendations for practice from this study are intended for directors of nursing programs and faculty. Directors of the university nursing programs should ensure the longest possible duration of separate clinical training and discuss with hospital managers the importance of a registered nurse as a mentor. The Faculty of Nursing at the University should continue on mentors' preparation providing continuing professional development programs at basic and advanced levels and developing and improving clinical training diaries under the needs of student nurses and up-to-date educational requirements.

Conclusions

The majority of the student nurses were satis-

fied with their practical training and one-third were very satisfied. The possibility to refer to staff and a positive atmosphere in the unit were recognized as most positive by student nurses taking practical placement at a university hospital in Lithuania. The students who noticed the highest individual input to their clinical training evaluated clinical learning environment at the best.

Assessment of pedagogical atmosphere by student nurses correlated with the year of studies, model of supervision, and, partly, duration of clinical training. Students reported to have benefitted most from being supervised by an individual mentor, and those without any kind of supervision reported the lowest ratings. A longer duration of clinical training correlated with better ratings of pedagogical atmosphere on the ward.

Statement of Conflict of Interest

The authors state no conflict of interest.

Pedagoginė praktinio mokymo(si) atmosfera universitetinėje ligoninėje slaugos studentų požiūriu

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Santrauka. *Įvadas.* Slaugos studentų praktinio mokymo(si) rezultatai priklauso ne vien tik nuo praktikos mokytojo ir paties studento požiūrio į klinikinę praktiką. Teigiamą mokymo(si) aplinką lemia organizaciniai gydymo įstaigos, kurioje vykdoma studentų praktika, ypatumai ir padalinio personalo pasirengimas mokyti ir vertinti būsimojus specialistus.

Tyrimo tikslas – ištirti pedagoginę slaugos studentų praktinio mokymo(si) atmosferą universitetinėje ligoninėje.

Metodai. Anoniminėje apklausoje dalyvavo pirmo–ketvirto kurso slaugos studentai iš Vilniaus universiteto, Vilniaus ir Šiaulių kolegijų, atlikę praktiką universitetinėje ligoninėje. Tyrimas vykdytas 2013 metų sausio–gegužės mėn. Naudota Klinikinio mokymo aplinkos skalė, studentams prieinama per internetinę prieigą. Anketa išversta į lietuvių kalbą ir adaptuoda Lietuvoje ankstesnio tarptautinio projekto (2003–2005) metu.

Rezultatai. Beveik pusė tiriamųjų (42,1 proc.) išreiškė pasitenkinimą neseniai baigta klinicine praktika ir 29,0 proc. buvo labai patenkinti. Studentų pasitenkinimas klinicine praktika nebuvo susijęs su jų amžiumi ar kursu ($p=0,060$). Bendras pedagoginės atmosferos vertinimas padalinyje buvo teigiamai susijęs su praktikos trukme ($p<0,01$; $r=0,161$). Dauguma studentų klinikinės praktikos metu buvo mokomi praktikos mokytojo ($N=168$) ir slaugos administratorių ($N=147$). Slaugos studentai savo asmeninį indėlį į klinikinę praktiką vertino gerai ($N=158$) ir labai gerai ($N=105$).

Išvados. Slaugos studentai geriausiai įvertino galimybę kreiptis į personalą ir teigiamą atmosferą padalinyje. Studentai, kurie nurodė didžiausią savo asmenį indėlį į klinikinę praktiką, geriausiai vertino klinikinio mokymo(si) aplinką. Ilgesnė praktikos trukmė buvo susijusi su geresniais slaugos studentų pedagoginės atmosferos vertinimais. Labiausiai patenkinti studentai klinikinės praktikos metu buvo mokomi praktikos mokytojų individualiai.

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