

Title: Learning from nursing students' experiences and perceptions of their clinical placements in nursing homes: an integrative literature review.

Julie Cooke, Kate Greenway, Sue Schutz

ABSTRACT

Objectives: This paper aims to investigate pre-registration nursing students' experiences and perceptions of their clinical placements in nursing homes in order to develop recommendations for nurse educators. Evidence indicates that nursing students do not view nursing home placements as favourably as acute hospital placements. Therefore, nurse educators are challenged to facilitate a change in students' perceptions towards working in the nursing home environment.

Design: An integrative literature review allowed for the analysis and synthesis of the data relating to students' experiences and perceptions of nursing home practice, from studies with diverse research designs.

Methods: An electronic database search of CINAHL (Ebsco), Pubmed, British Nursing Database (BND), ERIC and social service abstracts, published from 2008 to April 2020 in English was completed. Papers were included using pre-allocated criteria and 649 qualified for closer examination. After exclusion, 21 papers underwent final analysis and synthesis using NIVIO 12.

Results: Five main themes were derived from the literature; i) the importance of effective supervision; ii) students' experiences and perceptions of the learning environment; iii) understanding the roles of care staff, iv) comprehensive orientation

to the learning environment, and v) curriculum preparation. From these five categories, two synthesised themes were developed: nursing home placement encounters and enhancing learning opportunities.

Conclusions: Increasing the visibility of caring for older people in the curriculum is urgent in order to address nursing students' perceived misconceptions about placements in nursing homes. The development of standalone older people pathways, delivered by experienced and knowledgeable faculty, as well as the provision of compulsory clinical placements in settings exclusive to nursing older people and supervised by registered nurses are recommended. Failing to resolve this immediate problem will result in a further shortage of nurses who are adequately prepared to meet future nursing needs.

Keywords

Nursing home

Nursing student

Education

Experiences

Perceptions

Clinical placements

Curriculum

Older people

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The proportion of the worldwide population aged over 65 years old, is projected to triple by 2050 (United Nations 2019). The Office for National Statistics (2018), predicts that in the next 50 years there will be an additional 8.2 million people aged over 65 years living in the United Kingdom (UK), bringing with it increased frailty and comorbidities (World Health Organisation (WHO) 2018). Some of these people will move into nursing homes, where personal care, assisted by health care assistants (HCA) is supervised with 24 hour nursing care, delivered by skilled registered nurses (RN). This increase in the proportion of older people comes at a time when nurse vacancies are at a record high, especially in nursing homes (Gershlick and Charlesworth, 2019). The WHO (2016a) Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health, estimated in 2016 that by 2030 there would be a global shortage of 7.6 million nurses and midwives. This, coupled with the shortage of RNs within the nursing home sector (RCN 2019) and an increase in the need for student placements, means that students at all levels of training will be likely to be allocated nursing home placements. These placements need careful consideration in order to establish learning opportunities and maintain safe and effective care for older people.

Nursing homes are viewed less favourably as first destinations of employment for newly qualified nurses than acute care placements (Wareing et al., 2017).

Additionally, It is well established that working in nursing homes is often viewed unfavourably by nursing students for student placements (Koh, 2012; Shen and Xiao, 2012; Garbrah et al., 2017). Shen and Xiao's (2012) cross sectional survey

exploring students' intentions to work with older people, concluded that students perceived working in the nursing home environment as "boring" and "unchallenging" (Shen and Xiao., 2012, p.221). Brown et al. (2008) concluded in a UK longitudinal study, which sought to identify students' learning experiences of caring for older people, that students do not enter the nursing profession with negative pre-dispositions towards caring for older people, but that these negative views are developed throughout their nurse training during clinical placements. In a survey to explore Australian nurses career choices, Mccann et al. (2010) attribute students' perceptions of caring for older people to the broader influences of the curriculum throughout their training and socialisation into nursing. These findings imply that nurse education plays an important role in shaping the negative views of students towards caring for older people in nursing homes. Nurse educators have some responsibility for changing these negative perceptions in order to prepare students to meet future healthcare demands.

However, there is an ambiguity in relation to the care of older people at the heart of nurse education. There is no statutory requirement to deliver content specific to caring for older people in nurse education (Garbrah et al., 2017) and it is not a requirement for students to experience a placement in a care setting exclusively for older people (Baumbusch et al., 2014). Indeed, educators may serve to reinforce negative views and misconceptions of nursing home care by including a heavy focus on acute care in the nursing curriculum (Alabaster, 2007; Garbrah et al., 2017; Naughton et al., 2019). The World Health Organisation recognised this disparity in Health Workforce for Ageing Populations (WHO, 2016b): this report recommended that more effort should be made by educators to develop courses that provide

theoretical and practical experiences that focus exclusively on caring for older people.

Similar literature reviews on this topic have explored students' experiences in older people care settings including acute elderly care units and students' attitudes towards caring for older people (Algozo et al., 2016), as well as the impact of the nursing home environment on student learning (Keeping-Burke et al., 2020). This review intends to develop knowledge by extracting from the data, students' perceptions and experiences of nursing home settings in order to draw conclusive educational messages and develop recommendations for education provision.

2. METHODS

This review followed Whitemore and Knafli's, (2005) five phases. The five steps of i) problem identification, ii) literature search, iii) data evaluation, iv) data analysis and v) presentation were followed. This approach enabled the inclusion of key primary evidence, regardless of design, to be collated, analysed and synthesised to offer a broad inclusive view of nursing students' experiences and perceptions of their clinical practice in nursing homes.

2.1 Literature search strategy

A systematic literature search in collaboration with a librarian was undertaken using the nursing databases CINAHL (Ebsco), Pubmed, British Nursing Database (BND), ERIC and social service abstracts in January 2020 (Figure 1). Reference lists were

scanned for additional research not identified in the original search. The search was limited to primary research published in English and used search terms (Figure 2) in the title, abstract or full text:

3.1.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Empirical research addressing student nurses' experiences and perceptions of their clinical practice in nursing homes were included. Where studies addressed multiple practice areas or professional groups, only papers that made it clear that results stemmed from adult nursing students in nursing homes were included. Peer reviewed research, published between 2008 and April 2020 and printed in English was selected to elicit the most up to date information. Studies were excluded if they focussed on qualified nurses, attitudes towards older people or caring for older people in settings other than nursing homes (Figure 3).

649 titles were identified. After duplicates were removed, the remaining titles (n=605) were screened leaving 97 papers, then by abstract leaving the full texts of 32 papers to review. 21 papers met the inclusion criteria. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) flow diagram (Figure 4) illustrates the systematic literature search and selection process.

2.2 Data evaluation

According to Whitemore and Knafl, (2005) an integrated review should be conducted using the best available evidence. Eleven qualitative papers were scored

out of 10 for methodological rigour using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP 2018) qualitative checklist. 7 cross sectional studies were scored out of 20 using AXIS (Downes et al., 2016). Finally, 3 mixed method papers were scored out of 13 using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Pluye et al., 2009). The quality scores were not used to exclude papers from the review but are reported (Table 1), considered and discussed with an aim of best answering the research question.

2.3 Data analysis

A constant comparative method of data analysis was undertaken to allow for the emergent interpretation and categorisation of data (Whittemore and Knaf, 2005). The selected studies were read line by line and data extracted which related to the purpose of the review. This data was named dependent on the subject matter, compared and then grouped into categories of similar meanings. From these categories the two main themes of nursing home placement encounters and enhancing learning opportunities were synthesised.

3 RESULTS

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the 21 studies exploring nursing students' experiences and perceptions of nursing home placements. Analysis of data identified 5 categories, i) the importance of effective supervision; ii) students' experiences and perceptions of the learning environment; iii) understanding the roles of care staff, iv) comprehensive orientation to the learning environment, and v) curriculum

preparation. From these 5 categories, 2 synthesised themes were developed: nursing home placement encounters and enhancing learning opportunities.

3.1 Theme 1: Nursing home placement encounters

The importance of effective supervision

Nursing students experienced that when they predominantly worked alongside health care assistants (HCA) during their clinical placements in nursing homes, it “...undermined nurse education” (Annear et al., 2014, p.4). Annear et al's. (2014) action research examined health care assistants (HCA) potential to adequately supervise students in Canadian nursing homes. Students commented that spending a prolonged time working with HCAs in nursing homes, made them feel like HCAs, as opposed to working with RNs in hospital settings where they “...feel more like registered nurses” (Annear et al., 2014, p. 4). Xiao et al's. (2012) action research which aimed to improve student placements in Australian nursing homes, reported student dissatisfaction at the limited amount of time spent with registered nurses (RN) in the nursing home setting. These findings aligned with a Norwegian study by Skaalvik et al. (2011) that explored how professional dialogue with registered nurses in nursing homes impacted on students' learning. The results concluded that the opportunity to engage in critical reflection with their registered practice assessors, was imperative in developing their clinical learning.

Suikkala et al. (2016) explored 80 second year student nurses' experiences of collaborative learning in Finnish nursing homes, by analysing qualitative content analysis of students' reflections of their placement. Students expressed that RNs

who are knowledgeable in the care of older people are appreciated as role models. The study was based on an education provider's partnership with an institution providing care for older people, in which the learning outcomes of the students were well communicated with RNs prior to the commencement of the placement. This could account for the positive results regarding students' ability to work alongside and discuss relative care of older people issues with RNs. The results further support the argument that students value the time they spend working alongside RNs as opposed to HCAs.

Experiences and perceptions of the nursing home as a learning environment.

A Norwegian study by Berntsen and Bjørk, (2010) used the Clinical Learning Environment Inventory (CLEI); a tool designed to identify factors that are significant to student learning; to examine the perceptions of first year student nurses towards nursing homes as learning environments, and found that students are generally satisfied with their placements. Bjork et al. (2014); Brynildsen et al. (2014); Carlson and Idvall. (2014) and Gonella et al. (2019) concur and add that students' experiences and perceptions were that nursing homes lacked essential learning opportunities and innovative experiences which resulted in their lack of motivation towards nursing home placements.

Students' perceptions in Xiao et al. (2012); Ryan et al. (2018) and Watson et al's. (2020) studies suggest that nursing homes offer little contribution past basic foundation skills, which results in their devaluation when compared to acute clinical placements. Watson et al's (2020) UK study used focus groups to explore students'

perceptions of nursing homes and co-create curricular nursing home content. During the focus groups, a video was played as a tool to engage students to think about enhancing the care of older people in nursing homes. Initially, students perceived the work as low in clinical skills and physically demanding work. However, after watching the video, the conversation evolved to discussing the role of a nursing home RN as one of isolation, which led to the recognition of the high levels of skill, responsibility and autonomy required by RNs in nursing homes.

Ryan et al. (2018) presented the survey results of 15 third year students' nursing home placements for which most reported positive learning experiences.

Interestingly, some students perceived that a placement in a nursing home was not suitable for third years, as the placement had not contributed to their knowledge and skills, and was therefore better suited to first years. Watson et al. (2020) reported similar findings, suggesting that first years can develop their essential skills in a less stressful environment, whilst a later placement opportunity would be better for third year students to develop complex decision making skills. Some students suggested the need to develop experience of caring for older people in other care settings prior to commencing a more complex and challenging nursing home placement (Watson et al., 2020).

Understanding the roles of staff in nursing homes

The studies reviewed indicated that some students were unclear about what RNs in nursing homes do (Skaalvik et al., 2012; Clarke, 2015; Moquin et al., 2018) resulting in reduced confidence for achieving learning outcomes compared to an acute

hospital placement (Indar et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2020). Clarke (2015) used focus groups with 13 students to explore nursing home placement experiences. They proposed that this lack of role clarity was underpinned by clearly defined task allocation, meaning that students only did personal care with HCAs and medicines with RNs. Similarly, Skaalvik et al's. (2010) study highlighted the administrative and supervisory role of the RN in a nursing home setting, which resulted in forming misconceptions about the nature of work and ability of RN practice supervisors to contribute to students' learning experiences. This supports earlier findings relating to the importance of working alongside RNs whilst undertaking clinical placements in nursing homes.

3.2 Theme 2: Enhancing learning opportunities

Orientation to the learning environment

Students revealed that comprehensive orientation to nursing homes is important in achieving a successful placement (Brynildsen et al., 2014; Lea et al., 2015; Indar et al., 2018), although it could be argued that this is important for placements in all care settings. Robinson et al. (2008) reported that students attending their first day in a nursing home placement were often shocked by the change of environment from their usual acute care settings. Robinson et al. (2008) implemented a three stage programme which sought to improve orientation to nursing home placements in particular. This programme demonstrated that minor amendments, such as changing starting times and providing information booklets made a positive difference to student placement satisfaction.

Robinson et al. (2009) supported these findings with a survey, asking 66 nursing home staff and 53 student nurses attending placement in nursing homes to answer 30 questions about their orientation experience. The results demonstrated that 52% of students felt excluded and doubted their practice assessors were expecting them. Alternatively, Brynildsen et al. (2014) and Snoeren et al. (2016) reported that where there is a successful orientation process, student's experienced increased confidence, an ability to identify learning opportunities and feeling prepared for the nursing home placement. Suikkala et al. (2016) suggest that students can assist this process by arranging to visit the care setting prior to the commencement of the placement. Indeed, this finding could also be transferred to other placement settings however, due to its frequency of occurrence within this review it is necessary to explore this point further.

Curriculum preparation

Duggan et al. (2013) explored nursing students' perceptions of their preparation to work with older people. Three focus groups (24) included adult nursing students and one (8), mental health students. Participants reported that they felt the nursing curriculum catered predominantly for the care of the acutely ill patient with a heavy focus on the teaching of technical skills. Students reported that core nursing skills and the care of the older person were "...seriously lacking" from the curriculum (Duggan et al., 2013, p.210). One student expressed this by stating "...they have not taught us how to just sit and talk to patients, make them feel comfortable, just look after them without the need for machines and things" (Duggan et al., 2013, p.210). This study also suggested the necessity for the lecturer to be experienced and

knowledgeable in caring for older people. Students commented that if courses are delivered by staff who are inexperienced in caring for older people, then nursing homes could be portrayed as somewhere it is only possible to learn 'basic' skills (Duggan et al., 2013). This resulted in further affirming misconceptions about the nursing home as a clinical practice placement. It is important to note that Duggan et al's. (2013) study focused on nursing older people in all care settings. However, only results that were specific when referring to nursing homes were included in this review.

Students in Mullenbach and Burggraf.(2012); O'Connell et al. (2018) and Watson et al's. (2020) studies felt they did not have adequate exposure to older people prior to clinical placement. Moquin et al. (2018) reported that a lack of experience with older people resulted in feelings of anxiety and apprehension prior to attending nursing home placements. O'Connell et al. (2018) conducted a questionnaire study which focused on preparing students to manage challenging behaviours in nursing homes. The results demonstrated that after studying a course specific to older peoples' care, students had developed more positive images of nursing homes. Watson et al. (2020) concurred and added that inviting older people to share experiences and nursing home staff to deliver lectures, would increase the student's motivation for practice in this environment. This further supports the need for more specific content on older peoples' care in the curriculum.

4. DISCUSSION

Nursing students' experiences of working alongside RNs was highlighted throughout the literature. However, the results revealed that in reality, students spend a great

deal of time working alongside health care assistants (HCA) in nursing homes and that this negatively impacts their placement experiences (Xiao et al., 2012; Annear et al., 2014; Clarke, 2015) and their ability to understand the role of nursing home RN (Moquin et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2020). This illustrates the priority that nursing students place on developing their professional identities through the process of socialisation alongside RNs in nursing homes (Neville et al., 2014). According to Zarshenas et al. (2014), the term 'professional identity' describes how individuals view themselves within their profession, whereas the process of developing this identity is called socialisation. Brown et al. (2008), suggest that socialisation is achieved through professional education and participation in clinical placements. Lee and Yang, (2019) conducted a grounded theory study to explore South Korean nursing students professional socialisation and added that clinical placements provide opportunities for students to familiarise themselves with the profession. They suggest that clinical contexts that are unfamiliar result in students being more cautious and passive in their learning. This finding highlights the importance of adequate professional supervision in order for students to identify with the role of nursing home RN.

Robinson et al. (2008), (2009); Suikkala et al. (2016) and Indar et al. (2018) recognised the need for comprehensive orientation to the nursing home learning environment. Robinson et al. (2008) revealed that as students are more frequently allocated placements in acute care settings, they often experience feelings of shock when attending placements in nursing homes. Snoeren et al. (2016) suggests that this results in student's inability to identify their learning needs. Lee and Yang, (2019) concluded that nurse educators should orientate students to differing cultures in

order to maximise learning opportunities. These findings emphasise the importance for nurse educators to form strong connections with nursing homes, to ensure that students entering clinical placements that are different from acute settings, receive adequate orientation to those differences, so that their placement goals and expectations are realistic (Suikkala et al. 2016) and their ability to build a professional identity is enhanced (Brown et al., 2008).

Students' expectations are not being met during nursing home placements, for which there are a number of putative explanations. Firstly, students are assigned to work alongside HCAs. As well as making socialisation difficult, this could lead to the misgiving that their competencies will be hard to achieve as suggest by Shen and Xiao. (2012). Secondly, students attending placements in nursing homes are typically in their first year of training (Abbey et al., 2006). Ryan et al. (2018) suggest that it is increasingly the norm for students in all years to be assigned nursing home placements. It is therefore possible that practice supervisors are acting on assumptions about students' skills, resulting in their expectations not being met. McCann et al. (2010) and Koh, (2012) suggests that liaising closely with nursing homes will assist educators to understand the RN role and learning objectives, facilitate student socialisation into the nursing profession and promote nursing care for older people as an area of skilled practice.

Students generally experienced satisfaction with the nursing home learning environment (Bernsten and Bjork, 2010; Carlson and Idvall., 2014; Gonella et al., 2019) but dissatisfaction with what they believed could be achieved (Xiao et al., 2012; Brynildsen et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2020). Alabaster et al. (2007) explored

UK nursing students' experiences of working with older people and identified that acute care environments do not always have the time or resources to meet the needs of older people. Students in Alabaster et al's. (2007) study perceived that nursing older people takes too much time resulting in the perception that it is the "...wrong kind of hard work" (Alabaster et al., 2007, p.70). Students develop their learning objectives for nursing home placements through the lens of their previous, more familiar acute experiences, as this is where the majority of their socialisation has taken place. The focus on acute care makes it difficult for students to identify learning opportunities and their sense of professional identity in alternative environments such as nursing homes. This supports the need for compulsory placements in nursing homes as advocated by WHO (2016b) who recommend the development of nursing curricula and placement experiences that are exclusive to nursing older people, in order to allow students to develop professional identities in nursing homes as well as acute hospital environments. The emphasis was placed on nurse educators to facilitate change in order to equip the future nursing workforce with the necessary skills and attributes required to meet the nursing needs of the ageing population.

Experienced and knowledgeable faculty role models are pivotal to the delivery of an effective curriculum (Suikkala et al., 2018) and can influence students' future career choices (Garbrah et al., 2017). Simpkins-Gibbs & Kulig. (2017) explored faculty clinical instructors' attitudes towards older people, and the influence this has on students. The results revealed that positive role models were appreciated by students, who began to mirror their mentors' actions and thoughts. This demonstrates that nurse educators are in a strong position to influence the career

choices of students (Garbrah et al., 2017; Naughton et al., 2018). Higher education institutions that are responsible for preparing the future workforce, should seek to employ faculty and engage practice educators with the skills and knowledge to develop standalone, older patient care pathways, focused on nursing in alternative environments such as nursing homes.

Students in Duggan et al's. (2015) study experienced that the nursing curriculum did not prepare them for working with older people or that there was little exposure to older people prior to placement. This finding was supported by Moquin et al. (2018); O'Connell et al. (2018) and Watson et al. (2020). The Health Workforce for Ageing Populations (WHO 2016b) document called for inclusion of curricula exclusive to nursing older people. Garbrah et al's. (2017) literature review considered the nursing curriculum's influence on students' career choices, concluding that nurse educators must develop stand-alone curricula, delivered by experienced and knowledgeable faculty role models in order to develop interest in older people care. The collective results of this review suggest that the development of pre-registration curriculum, dedicated to caring for older people could promote older people care among student nurses. Research exploring how nurse educators prepare students for clinical practice in nursing homes and students' experiences of this, is required in order to further understand this phenomenon and develop focused strategies to facilitate urgent changes in policy.

Urgent recommendations for education

- Educators need to acknowledge the differences in nursing home placements to enable adequate supervision and support student nurses to identify professionally with the role of RN in a nursing home.
- Educators should form strong relationships with nursing homes to recognise environmental differences, meet student's placement expectations and identify placement learning objectives.
- Educators should implement compulsory placements in nursing homes to address preconceived misconceptions about the learning environment.
- HEIs should employ faculty with the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm for nursing home care to facilitate a change in perceptions towards working in this sector.
- Educators should develop pre-registration modules dedicated to caring for older people in all care settings including nursing homes, as well as increasing exposure to older people and nursing home staff within the curriculum.

5. LIMITATIONS

An integrative review that includes different research methods poses a challenge to the interpretation of the findings. However, it could be argued that the inclusion of multiple methodologies offers rich and detailed information about nursing students' experiences and perceptions of their clinical practice in nursing homes in order to draw solid recommendations for education provision. Additionally, although a clear strategy was used to identify the research papers, it is possible that other relevant studies such as 'grey' or unpublished literature could have been missed. Although

the quality appraisal of the papers demonstrated a high level of rigour, it is recognised that there were some limitations. For example, it is possible that researcher bias could be present whilst using focus groups and interview methods with participants from the researcher's own institution.

6. CONCLUSION

Nursing students perceive that nursing home placements will not add to the skills and competencies required for their future practice. Nurse educators are therefore challenged to change these misconceptions to ensure adequate nursing provision for the ageing population. Nursing education policy must urgently implement focussed care of older adult pathways into the curriculum, which include compulsory practice placements in settings exclusive to older adults such as nursing homes. Results of this review suggest that the development and implementation of stand-alone curricula focused on the care of older people would address this issue. Research is needed to explore the current provision and experiences of student nurses, of their preparation to care for older people in nursing homes.

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