

Challenges Facing Medical Surgical Nursing Students in the Clinical Learning Environment

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Abstract: Clinical training plays a crucial role in shaping nursing as a profession. Unfortunately, there are different challenges facing nursing students during their learning process. Some of these challenges are related to educators, clinical environment, hospital staff, patients and the nursing students themselves. **Design:** descriptive design was utilized **Aim:** to assess the challenges facing medical surgical nursing students at Alexandria University Hospital. **Setting:** The study was carried out in the Faculty of Nursing, Alexandria University, Egypt. **Subjects:** The subject of this study consisted of a convenience sample of 200 students. **Tool:** Challenges and learning issues questionnaire was used in order to collect the data. It included two parts: **Part I:** Student's socio-demographic data, **Part II:** Students opinions about educator's role, environment, hospital staff and students' role. **Results:** Although, the majority of students appreciate the educator's role whether supportive, educative or evaluative, The students' experiences indicated numerous problems related to clinical environments, hospital staff, patients and students themselves. **Conclusion:** Clinical environment filled with multiple challenges which results in tension and stress that have negative effects on students' learning encounter. **Recommendation:** Encourage participation of hospital nursing staff in clinical education as the strategies to improve the clinical education

Keywords: Challenges, students, clinical training.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the imperative aspects that not only imparts the essential skills, abilities, attitudes and knowledge among learners, but also leads to overall growth, development and progress of the individuals, community and the nation. Effectively educated nursing students are not only able to accomplish their anticipated goals and objectives but are also able to render an efficient contribution towards the well-being of the whole society (1).

Learning process is more important than learning outcome, as it is approach of learning that reflects how students learn in different teaching and learning environments. Therefore, understanding students' learning processes and factors influencing it will provide valuable information for nurse educators and faculty members for providing high quality education(2, 3). In the healthcare field, nurses play an integral role in nursing such as; providing care to patients and taking responsibility of leadership and patient's education roles at hospitals, health systems, and other organizations. However, being a nurse is associated with multiple big challenges that make great effects on the academic performance of the nursing students (4).

Nursing education is composed of two complementary parts: theoretical and practical training. A large share of nursing education is carried out in clinical environments (5, 6).

Unfortunately, there are different challenges facing nursing students during their learning process in general and during their practical training in particular. Some of these challenges are related to educators, clinical environment, hospital staff, patients and the nursing students themselves.

Regarding to the educators-related challenges; faculty is an institution designed for the attitude modification, teaching and learning of learners under the supervision of educators. Many teachers can be only a teacher, but a few can be an effective and successful teacher. Therefore, to be an effective successful teacher does not have a deep understanding of knowledge only but have a lot of attributes of personal and professional competencies. Educators must be responsible to create a supportive learning climate, imparts enthusiasm, motivation and an interactive teacher-student relationship. So, educators have both direct and indirect effects along the learning process through their qualifications, experiences, teaching strategies, media and evaluation methods which used by them to achieve learning objectives (7-11).

Spotting the light on another but very important challenge which is considered the core of nursing education is the clinical training period of nursing students. Clinical training is essential for the preparation and graduation of highly qualified professional nurses. The quality of students - clinical educator's interaction can either facilitate or hinder the students' learning in the clinical area. Contrasting classroom education, clinical training in nursing occurs in a stressful and complex clinical learning environment which is influenced by numerous factors (12).

Clinical environment provides chances for nursing students to learn via hands on experiment and to convert theoretical knowledge to a variety of practice and psychomotor skills which are of significance for patient care (13). Students' exposure and preparation to enter the clinical setting are one of the important factors affecting the quality of clinical education (14). Since an optimal clinical learning environment has a positive impact on the students' professional development, a poor learning environment can have adverse effects on their professional development process (15).

Moreover, unpredictable complex nature of the practical training environment can create some problems for nursing students (16). Disappointment to identify these challenges and problems which students will face in the clinical learning environment can prevent them from learning, progress and growth effectively. So, effective and prime learning environment should be redesigned to include variety of learning activities and opportunities to foster achievement of the desired learning outcomes. Physical and psychological environment should be disciplined, comfortable and well ordered to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between teacher and students as well as among the peers to enhance learning process, improve psychological environment and provide positive attitude toward learning. (1, 17-18).

Furthermore, the violent behavior of patients in hospitals is considered one of the challenges which facing nursing students during their clinical practice related to patients. Many patients are lacking effective ways to communicate well and can be violent at times. Therefore nursing profession is highly demanding and quite very stressful at times. Workplace violence is a serious problem among nurses. Although, most of the time, not only patients are the major sources of violence against nurses; other health personnel's makes it too (19).

High-quality therapeutic communication with the relatives is the backbone of the art and science of the nursing profession (20). Therapeutic communication has important effects on the wellbeing of patient's health status, family's overall satisfaction, as well as on the quality of the provided nursing care (21, 22).

Studies showed that the students' no effective exposure to the clinical learning environment has increased dropout rates. Some nursing students have left the profession as a result of challenges they face in the clinical setting (23). Another study showed that nursing students are vulnerable in the clinical environment and this reduces their satisfaction with the clinical training (24). Moreover, the nursing students' lack of knowledge and skills in the clinical environment can lead to anxiety (25). Yazdaniket al (2012) found that nursing students suffered from inferiority complex after entering the clinical settings (26).

From the researchers' experience -as faculty members- during training the nursing students at Medical –Surgical Nursing Department and direct contact with them, they noticed that nursing students face many challenges and problems related to their work such as work overload, lack of respect from others, psychosocial atmosphere in clinical environment, perceived experience (positive or negative), interpersonal relationships and exposure to some hazards and diseases, which in turn affects the quality of care. Therefore, the complexity of learning in the clinical environments has led the researchers to investigate about the existing factors in this environment. Therefore, this study was conducted.

Aim of the study: This study aimed to assess the challenges facing medical surgical nursing students at Alexandria University Hospitals.

Research question: What are the challenges facing medical surgical nursing students at Alexandria University Hospitals?

II. BODY OF ARTICLE

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

Design: Descriptive design was utilized

Setting: The study was conducted at the Faculty of Nursing, Alexandria University

Subject: The study included a convenience sample of 200 students.

Epi info program v 7.0 was used to find the sample size by applying the following parameters.

Expected frequency 50%

Acceptable error 5%

Confidence coefficient 95%

Population size 680students

Minimum sample size 200students

Tools: one tool was used to collect data for the present study.

Tool I: Challenges and learning issues questionnaire:(7-9,12,14,17-18,20,25)

A structured questionnaire constructed by the researchers after thorough review of related literature to assess challenges and learning issues that may face students during their clinical experience. The tool consisted of two main parts.

Part 1: Student's socio-demographic data.

This part includes student's socio demographic data such as; age, sex, academic year, place of residence, as well as students' satisfaction with choosing nursing as profession, satisfaction with clinical training methods .

Part 2: Students' Opinion About challenges and learning issues facing students ' during their clinical training.

This part constructed by the researchers to identify students' opinions about educator role ,clinical environment , hospital staff, patient and student role .The tool was composed of statement in which the students responded in a three-point likert scale agree, neutral and disagree. The tool comprised 54 statements that are divided into 5 groups of items distributed as follows.

-28statement related to educator role.

-9 statement related to physical and psychological environment

-5 statement related to hospital staff

-5 statement related to patient

-7 statement related to student role

Twenty –eight statements concerned with instructor role in the clinical area whether supportive, educative and evaluate role. some of the main themes that discussed in this section are, reassurance given to students, assurance of their confidentiality, availability of the instructor in the ward, information that given to students about different situations in the ward, instructor mediator role between students and hospital staff and lastly continuous feedback that they received from instructor about their progress in the clinical performance.

Nine statements related to physical and psychological environment. The main themes that covered in this section are availability of place in the ward for students, cleanliness in the ward, stressors that present in the ward. Five statement related to hospital staff .The main themes that covered in this section are if hospital staff help instructor to achieve educational objectives, Welcome students presence, Give students opportunity to learn ,Provide student e medical record, and finally way of dealing student

Five statements related to patient concerned with patient role in the clinical area as presence of un cooperative aggressive patient, very ill patients, fear of students' mistakes and lack of interest in dealing with student .Seven statement related to student role. The main themes that covered in this section are Lack of knowledge, Lack of communication skills, Paper

International Journal of Novel Research in Healthcare and Nursing

Vol. 6, Issue 3, pp: (1018-1027), Month: September - December 2019, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

work load, fear from patients, focus of grades, Coming to clinical area unprepared finally difficulty in developing and implement a plan of care according to the priorities and available resources.

Method

An official letter was obtained from the administrative office of the Faculty of Nursing. The study tool was developed by the researchers after thorough review of relevant literature. The tool was submitted to 5 experts in Medical Surgical Nursing and Nursing Education Departments to test its content validity and the necessary modification was done accordingly. Reliability of the study tool was done using the cronbach's alpha test and its value (r) was 0.977 which indicates high correlation and was statically reliable

A Pilot study was conducted on 20 students for testing clarity, feasibility and applicability of the study tool, and these students were excluded from the sample subjects. Two hundred adult students in Faculty of Nursing were included in the study.

Students were interviewed individually during the end of clinical experience, the interview ranged from 15 to 20 minutes for each student. Data collection was carried out over a period of three months (from May 2019 to July 2019).

Ethical considerations:

Purpose of the study was introduced for all students enrolled in the study and student's informed consent to participate in the study was obtained. Every student was informed that anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy would be assured.

Statistical analysis of the data

The following statistical measures were used :(27)

Descriptive statistics. Count and percentage: used for describing data.

III. RESULTS

Table (1) Illustrates socio-demographic characteristic of the study sample. As regards **age**, it was observed that all students (100%) were less than 20 years old and regarding **sex**, around two thirds of them were females. in relation to their **academic year**, it was found that half of students (50.5%) were in the first academic year and the majority of them had **area of residence** inside Alexandria and had adequate **family income**. Two thirds of students were live with family. Figure (1,2) portray that 82.5% of them **satisfying with choosing nursing as a profession and** more than three quarter of students **satisfying with clinical training methods**

Table (II): shows distribution of students according to their challenges & learning issues facing students ' during their clinical training As for educator's role it was found that around two thirds of students agreed that educator had a supportive role as they respect student privacy, feel secure by instructor presence, take in consideration student safety and appreciate right opinion and they had an educative role as they discuss difficult situations in the ward ,work as mediator between hospital staff and students and also they encourage students to read about patients problems and also they had an evaluative role as they give constructive feedback.

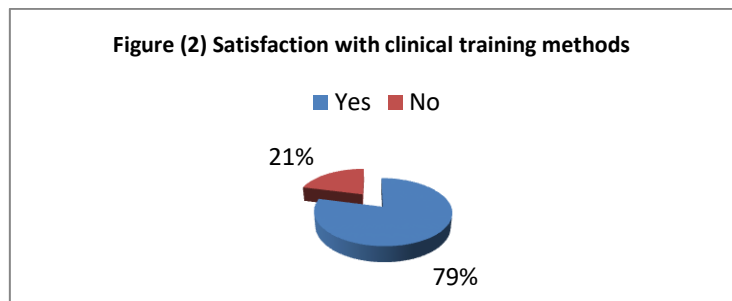
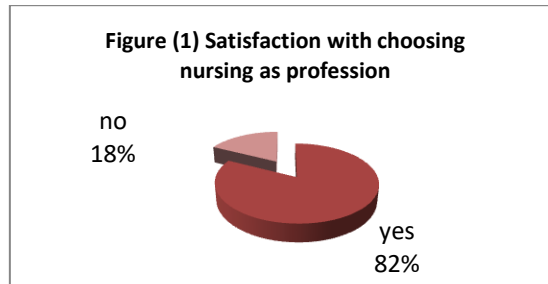
In relation to challenges related to environment, it was found that near than half of students agreed that the hospital physical environment were had place for changing uniform , overcrowded , had a place for discussion, clean and equipment & supplies were available .regards psychological environment it was noticed that near than half of students agree that it had a negative effect of rapid turnover of the patients , it was stressful place for group discussion and

Regarding hospital staff it was found that 55.5 % of students agreed that the hospital staff help instructors to achieve educational objectives and more than one third of them agreed that they provide student with medical record and welcome students' presence and less than half of students agreed that the hospital staff give students opportunity to learn but they were aggressive with them.

Regards patients it was observed that high percent of students 82.5%, 80.5% respectively agreed that the patients were aggressive on them and had Lack of interest to work with them .78.5%, 77.5% of students agreed that patients were very ill and they fear of students' mistakes and more than half of the patients were un cooperative.

Considering students' role it was reported that around three quarter of students agreed that they had lack of knowledge ,had paper work load, fear from patients, Difficulty in developing and implement a plan of care according to the priorities and available resources, come to clinical area unprepared ,focus of grades and 80.5% of students had lack of communication skills.

Age		
20<	200	100%
20>	0	0
Sex		
Male	68	34
Female	132	66
Academic year		
First	101	50.5
Second	99	49.5
Area of residence		
Inside Alexandria	198	99
Outside Alexandria	2	1
Family income		
adequate	194	97
Not adequate	6	3
Residency during academic year		
With relative	78	39
University student hostel	0	0
With family	122	61



I. Educator's role						
a. Supportive role						
1. Respect student privacy	137	68.5	49	24.5	14	7
2. Feel secure by instructor presence	131	65.5	59	29.5	10	5
3. Accessible all the time	105	52.5	69	34.5	26	13
4. Take in consideration student safety	123	61.5	59	29.5	18	9
5. Defend student rights	117	58.5	57	28.5	26	13
6. Allow expression of opinion	111	55.5	65	32.5	24	12
7. Appreciate right opinion	123	61.5	55	27.5	22	11
8. Perform pre-training seminars about measure to prevent infection	108	54	76	38	16	8
9. Maintain appearance of nursing profession	115	57.5	69	34.5	16	8
10. Follow ethical principles	107	53.5	63	31.5	30	15
11. Deal efficiently with hospital staff	95	47.5	73	36.5	32	16
1. Inform the students' about the objectives at the beginning of clinical experience	111	55.5	67	33.5	22	11
2. Discuss difficult situations in the ward	120	60	56	28	24	12
3. Mediator between hospital staff and students	128	64	42	21	30	15
4. Facilitate interaction with hospital staff	107	53.5	59	29.5	34	17
5. Encourage students to read about patients problems	131	65.5	43	21.5	26	13
6. Relate theory to practice	115	57.5	59	29.5	26	13
7. Encourage use of new technology during provision of care	104	52	74	37	22	11
8. Use results of researches in clinical training	101	50.5	59	29.5	40	20
9. Follow rules and regulation of hospital during training	90	45	66	33	44	22

10. Maintain patient right	96	48	52	26	52	26
11. Using simulation strategy in clinical training	108	54	68	34	24	12
12. Inform students about their responsibilities for the shift	97	48.5	77	38.5	26	13
c. Evaluative role						
1. Fair in clinical evaluation	98	49	64	32	38	19
2. Providing feedback in front of other student.	106	53	60	30	34	17
3. Give constructive feedback	122	61	44	22	34	17
4. Discuss students' progress	106	53	60	30	34	17
5. Use of different methods of evaluation.	97	48.5	67	33.5	36	18
II. Environment						
a. Physical						
1. Unavailable place for changing uniform	95	47.5	67	33.5	38	19
2. Availability of equipment & supplies	89	44.5	77	38.5	34	17
3. Had a place for discussion	89	44.5	79	39.5	32	16
4. Clean	93	46.5	73	36.5	34	17
5. Overcrowded	90	45	78	39	32	16
b. Psychological						
1. Negative effect of rapid turnover of the patients	67	33.5	87	43.5	46	23
2. Stressful place for group discussion	78	39	73	36.5	49	24.5
3. Safe hospital environment for learning	79	39.5	84	42	37	18.5
4. Over/'crowded medical& other nursing student	91	45.5	72	36	37	18.5
III. Hospital staff						
1. Hinder instructor to achieve educational objectives	111	55.5	67	33.5	22	11
2. Welcome students presence	69	34.5	85	42.5	46	23
3. Provide student e medical record	64	32	79	39.5	57	28.5
4. Give students opportunity to learn	95	47.5	50	25	55	27.5
5. Aggressive with student	87	43.5	70	35	43	21.5
IV. Patients						
1. Un cooperative	113	56.5	54	27	33	16.5
2. Aggressive	165	82.5	29	14.5	6	3
3. Very ill patients	157	78.5	35	17.5	8	4
4. Lack of interest	161	80.5	29	14.5	10	5
5. Fear of students' mistakes	155	77.5	35	17.5	10	5
V. Students' role						
1. Lack of knowledge	149	74.5	41	20.5	10	5
2. Lack of communication skills	161	80.5	31	15.5	8	4
3. Paper work load	157	78.5	37	18.5	6	3
4. Fear from patients	154	77	38	19	8	4
5. Focus of grades	150	75	40	20	10	5
6. Come to clinical area unprepared	146	73	46	23	8	4
7. Difficulty in developing and implement a plan of care according to the priorities and available resources	152	76	36	18	12	6

IV. DISCUSSION

Clinical training plays a crucial role in shaping nursing as a profession as it provide students with professional abilities and give opportunity to link theoretical information with practice and help students to develop autonomy in decision-making to enable them become safe, caring competent nurses.^(1, 4, 6) Many factors are founded to affect clinical training such as students' characteristics, skills and abilities of the teachers, clinical area environment and effective communication with hospital staff.^(8,13,17,20) So ,improving quality of clinical training among nursing students requires the work to identify problems facing students and use of effective educational ways for improvement .Going with this context, the present study was carried out to identify challenges facing medical surgical nursing students during their clinical training .

Characteristics of the sample:

Regarding age: The present study revealed that the majority of the students' age less than 20 years, it returns to medical surgical nursing teaching in first and second years of faculty academic years and students enter faculty at age 18 years. Furthermore, the present study illustrated that females represented higher percentage than males. It could be interpreted due to the overwhelming majority of the Egyptian nursing students are females. This result was supported by Lui et al (2014)⁽²⁸⁾ who study Perceived Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices concerning Human Immunodeficiency Virus among Medical and Nursing Students reported that More than half of students were females .

The present study showed that regarding area of residence almost all the students are from inside Alexandria and are living with their families. This is may be related to the geographic allocation system of higher education in Alexandria. As regard satisfaction with choosing nursing as a profession. The present study reported that the highest percentage of students have satisfaction with choosing nursing as profession This is in line with Abd ELNabi and Hassan (2016)⁽²⁹⁾ who study mental health and self-esteem among faculty nursing students and indicated that about two thirds of students were satisfied and convinced with their choice of nursing career .Also, Papastavrou (2016)⁽³⁰⁾ reported nursing students were highly satisfied with the clinical learning environment especially first year faculty students .

In relation to the educators' role: The majority of students agree about effective educators' roles which mean educators were positively viewed by most students. They appreciate their role whether supportive, educative or evaluative. This result is in agreement with Changizetal (2012)⁽³¹⁾ who mentioned that instructors have an important role in recognition and control of stressor and helping students in attaining effective clinical experience and learning. Also, Madhavanprabhakaran (2013)⁽³²⁾ mentioned that clinical instructors' behaviors play a key role in learning process of students. It could be interpreted in that educators received continuous training and education in how to manage clinical training for example faculty and leadership development center provide educators with many training regarding their effective teaching role and communication skills.

The only disagree point was educators give feed back to the students in front on other students which causing embarrassment to students .This result was confirmed by Abd -El-Razik A and khamis G (2016)⁽³³⁾ whose study was carried out in neonate intensive care unit to identify the clinical training stress factors among intern nurses mentioned that criticism by preceptors and colleagues in front of medical staff was a high interpersonal stress factor among intern nurses.

As regard environment: The students verified that the clinical environment in the hospital is stressful and far from being conducive to learning. On the other hand, the wards are noisy, overcrowded with medical and nursing student, no private place for discussion with the educators. This result is supported by Mahran (2019)⁽³⁴⁾ during assessment of the challenges and work crisis facing critical care nurses recorded that working atmosphere filled with tension and stress.

In addition to, negative effect of rapid turnover of the patients on students' education as students did not have enough time to complete patients' assessment and implementation of nursing care and found it difficult to initiate communication with the new patients. So improving clinical training through qualified educator, safe environment and follow of effective communication skills. This was in congruent with Pourghane (2013)⁽³⁵⁾ who concluded that applying theoretical knowledge in practice and providing optimal clinical learning environment requires experienced clinical instructors, and safe environment .

Considering hospital staff: The results illustrated that the majority of the students confirmed that hospital staff are not helping educators to achieve educational objective, less welcome to students presence and discriminate between nursing students and medical students. This result is supported by Mohebbi et al (2012)⁽³⁶⁾ who mentioned that a high percentage of nursing students complained of discrimination between them and students of other fields. This could be related to hospital staff may be poorly informed about student's educational objective and learning needs resulting in less cooperation with the educators and students beside crowed environment with many students from nursing and medicine students. Also, hospital staffs most of the time is busy due to work overload and paper work that make them uncooperative with students.

In relation to Patients: The present study revealed that majority of patients was uncooperative, aggressive, lack of interest, and fear of students' mistakes. This result may be due to many patients are difficult to communicate due to their fatigue and complications from the disease beside some patients had bad experience from students mistake .in addition to,

students lack communication skills with patients especially first year academic student. This result supported by Jirwe (2010)⁽³⁷⁾ noted that student nurses lack skills and confidence in cross-cultural communication. Also, the result confirmed by Abdulmutalib (2019)⁽³⁸⁾ who confirmed that the common hindering factors among all students were fear of making mistakes

Regarding students: the present study confirmed that many of students reported lack of knowledge and clinical skills as well as communication skills. This result may be due to nursing students are occupied with many duties and having many paper work load and did not have enough time to enhance their clinical skills and rich their knowledge. The previous results are in accordance with those of Jamshidi *et al.* (2016)⁽⁶⁾ who reported that majority of students in their study have lacking of theoretical knowledge and practical skills and consider them as one of the problems involved in care giving

The present study illustrated that majority of students are focusing on grades, having paper workload, Fearing from patients. This could be related to students are being unsure of their clinical competence and found it difficult to initiate therapeutic conversation with the patients. All these factors lead to increase students stress and anxiety which affect negatively in clinical learning process. This result is supported by Abd -El-Razik A and khamis G (2016)⁽³³⁾ who reported that slightly more than half of intern nurses experienced moderate level of anxiety.

Also, the results agreed with lui *et al* (2014)⁽²⁸⁾ who illustrated that although students have high level of HIV knowledge. They displayed negative attitudes and unacceptable practices probably due to fear. As for Coming to clinical area unprepared the present study verified that majority of students come unprepared This result is supported by Joolaeetal (2015)⁽¹⁴⁾ who reported that the nursing students' unpreparedness for entering clinical environment.

The present study showed that majority of students have a difficulty in developing and implementing a plan of care according to the priorities and available resources This result supported by Farzi S (2018)⁽³⁹⁾ reported that nursing process was not used effectively in clinical education and emphasized on the full implementation of the nursing process in clinical education.

V. CONCLUSION

Findings of the present study concluded that:

The students' experiences indicate numerous challenges related to educators, clinical environments, hospital staff, patients and students themselves. Clinical environment was filled with tension and stressors that have a negative effect on their clinical training. Also, hospital staff are not helping educators to achieve educational objectives. In addition, uncooperative and aggressive patients. Finally, students are lacking skills related to communication and clinical performance.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are to be considered:

- Collaboration between health care institutions and clinical educators should be assured in order to overcome clinical training problems and improve it. Also, encourage participation of hospital nursing staff in clinical education as the strategies to improve the clinical education
- The clinical educator should examine the cognitive and emotional aspects of the student before clinical education. In addition to, providing training courses or workshops on communication skills for both educators and students

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Vol. 6, Issue 3, pp: (1018-1027), Month: September - December 2019, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

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