

Nursing Students' Lived Experience of the Clinical Learning Environment in a Geriatric Facility

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Abstract: Caring for older adults has become ever more difficult due to numerous factors. It is essential to understand the 4th-year student nurses' perspective when caring for geriatric patients. This paper aims to explore 4th-year student nurses' experiences with elderly patients in the Geriatric Ward to help distinguish teaching, learning, and support needs. There were 12 participants selected through purposive sampling who agreed to participate in the study. The participants were graduating student nurses at one of the Colleges of Health Sciences in Ajman, United Arab Emirates. A qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach was adopted, and data was collected using a semi-structured interview, observation, and document analysis. The students described the learnings they have had on a personal level during their encounters in the clinical area. This permitted the researcher to gain an in-depth knowledge of the students lived experience in caring for geriatric patients. Thematic analysis was used to interpret and analyze the data, while also using the seven steps used in Colaizzi's approach.

Keywords: clinical placement, nursing students, geriatric ward, geriatric patients.

I. INTRODUCTION

Placement in the clinical area happens in every semester of the program in the various settings: the community, schools, hospitals, or health centers. It allows students specific opportunities to prepare themselves for independent practice, such as the opportunity to assume responsibility, practice skills, and gain confidence in their ability to provide nursing care. Clinical placement associates theory with practice as an integral part of nursing education (Wang and Chen 2010; Chapman and Orb 2000; Gray and Smith 2000). It improves communication skills (Pigott 2001). It also deals with work-life certainties, hence assisting students in developing their roles as professional nurses (Hartigan-Rogers et al. 2007) (Moyle 2003; Happell and Brooker 2001). The number of older adults is growing in all regions, and similarly, older adults are living longer (United Nations, 2007). Gerontological nursing is ranked last or almost last among selected specialties (Moyle 2003; Happell and Brooker 2001). Various inquiries have reported that the management of older adults is the least favored field of discipline among student nurses in Norway (Bergland & Lærum, 2002; Kloster, Høie, & Skår, 2007) and in other countries (Happell, 2002; Stevens & Crouch, 1998).

Students often encounter several challenges during their clinical experiences (Bashford 2002; Chapman and Orb 2000) due to incompetence, skepticism, and overload, among other reasons (McKenna et al. 2010; Zupiria et al. 2007). The previous study found that students endured anxiety and disappointment with the clinical placement (Chan 2002) and regarded the gap between what they learned and what nurses do (Sharif and Mousumi 2005). Clinical placement in geriatric facilities is compulsory for student nurses in one of the Colleges of Health Sciences in Ajman, United Arab Emirates; nonetheless, it is a challenging area to learn in because of patients' complex care needs (Xiao, Paterson, Henderson, & Kelton, 2008).

This study is a descriptive phenomenology that gives a depiction of the characteristics of person, situations, or groups (Polit & Hungler, 2004).

II. BODY OF THE ARTICLE

METHODS:

The study design used a descriptive phenomenological method using Colaizzi's phenomenological approach to allow the participants to reflect on their experiences during their clinical placements. It also allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth knowledge of the students' lived experience.

In understanding the philosophical bases of phenomenology, a convenient but purposeful sample of 12 students was chosen from the College of Nursing in Ajman, United Arab Emirates. The participants gave informed consent in writing to take part in the study.

The qualitative descriptive study involved a semi-structured interview. The interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, and those who did not want to be taped wrote their responses on the questionnaire provided using open-ended questions. The researcher interviewed the participants to gather the data. Thematic analysis was used to interpret and analyze the data while using the seven steps used in Colaizzi's approach. Some significant statements and theme clusters were integrated to formulate the overall themes which describe the phenomenon thoroughly.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The study described the lived experiences of student nurses on how they cope with the learning and issues in learning practice in the geriatric ward. To have a thorough, accurate description of the phenomena to be investigated from the viewpoint of the informants, specific questions have been formulated by the researcher, and they will be answered during the interview process. The researcher asked the questions: (1) "During your clinical placement in the geriatric ward, what are the learning experiences you gained you consider helpful?" (2) "What are the difficulties you have encountered in the practice of nursing in the geriatric ward?" (3) "How have these difficulties affected your training as a student nurse?" (4) "What response did you receive when you have raised or identified areas of need to your preceptor?"

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The results that emerged from an extensive interpretation of the typescripts are exhibited as a series of 3 expressed themes.

Themes are explained concisely by samples of the discourse from which they developed, and the importance of each theme is discussed.

Theme 1: Basic Geriatric Nursing Tasks

Student nurses viewed geriatric clinical placement as providing possibilities to learn, practice and gain proficiency in what was commonly referred to as "basic nursing skills."

Some students said:

I feel proud of myself when providing care to aged patients because I developed my skills of assisting the activities of daily living almost every day, such as bathing and feeding patients and combing their hair.

... I monitored patients' vital signs, administered IMs and subcutaneous injections many times, and assessed patient's neurological statuses every day.

...Ensured patients safety by using the "Morse scale for risk of fall."

Excellent communication with geriatric patients is essential for student nurses and staff. Older patients have different demands, and carrying through with them can be challenging.

Some students said:

I have to keep them calm if they get mad because even for small things or simple issues---and I don't say harsh words to them --- they get mad will react immediately.

If my patient becomes aggressive, I try to talk to them nicely and slowly. If they calm, I start to do what I want to do; if they refused and become stubborn, I leave them, then come back whenever they are quiet and in a good mood.

However, the nursing students expressed that much of their time was spent on basic nursing tasks that were already well-known to students. They were worried because the opportunities to learn complex technical skills, which they saw as the core of modern nursing, were not performed in the current clinical area.

Most procedures we had during the placement were for unconscious patients. I want to broaden my knowledge as much as possible by learning such skills as CPR, intravenous insertion, and flow rate calculation using an infusion pump. Moreover, each patient has a caregiver performs procedures, such as feeding via a PEG tube and administering oxygen (student).

Students believe that technical information related to surgery, medicine, and highly technical equipment are important, and knowledge related to holistic physical and psychosocial care are of lower importance. Modern communications, especially popular television programs, strengthen this information (Blundell 2005).

Most of the time, patients are bedridden, so there are limitations to applying procedures, unlike in the ER, CCU, and ICU. With high-tech equipment, I can say that it will be a productive experience (student).

Theme 2: Patience and Compassion

The researcher believes that patience and compassion are often necessary when caring for geriatric patients. Elderly patients want to feel important and respected, and they value their independence.

Some students said:

I learned how to be patient with my patient. I develop my ways of persuasion to help her meet her needs and achieve the best care for her.

I have to be flexible in dealing with my patient.

I maintain full attention to the needs of aged patients and try to meet their needs as much as I can through listening.

Geriatric patients have more needs than younger patients, which can make it increasingly challenging to provide quality care. It requires the healthcare professionals to spend more time delivering care than might be necessary with other populations.

When talking to my patients, I have to use their pace because they are a little bit slower to understand. There are lots of things they do not know like medicines and health care system; they need someone to navigate them through (student).

Some students find it rewarding to take care of elderly patients. It is an opportunity for them to provide excellent care and achieve satisfaction in being able to perform fundamental duties of nursing considering the patient's diverse needs.

Providing care to my patient is not easy since she is bedridden. But I handled it by focusing on fulfilling my desire to help. It gives me fulfillment (student).

I'm glad to work and care for elderly patients because everyone has the right to have excellent care, like those who sometimes are forgotten by their families. (student)

Theme 3: Value of Preceptor

The preceptor is a registered nurse who is a staff nurse of the practice-based setting who supports the nursing student during the clinical placement.

One of the roles of the preceptor is to ensure the student nurse applies classroom learning in a clinical setting by designing learning experiences and patient care assignments.

Some students reported:

She always assigned me to check and monitor patients' vital signs and change wound dressings.

She allows me to administer IM and subcutaneous medications.

I always assist my preceptor when we bathe the patients and do other morning care. This is not the best experience, but it is a chance to show to my preceptor my skills.

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The preceptors were aware that time was needed to be useful in their role. However, students stated that the lack of time to teach everything that needed to be taught was frustrating and sometimes caused students to be pushed in the background.

Some students reported:

It seems that my preceptor is always busy. She has always told me "next time" if I ask for assistance when it comes to performing procedures for my patient.

She told me to observe and observe... not doing the actual procedures frustrates me ...

She is not willing to teach, because she is busy has told me she has many things to do.

There was an apparent lack of understanding by preceptors with regard to the paperwork produced by the college, which led to confusion and difficulty concerning the nature of the support that the student received from the preceptor.

Students stated:

My preceptor is hesitant to let me use their computer to access my patient's file.

It is as if they are not happy to let us use their computer in the unit to access a patient's file...

There were days that my preceptor told me not to use the computer to access a patient's file...

Sometimes, my preceptor will just tell me to "look and find it in the book" or "I'm busy right now"- when I ask about drug calculations and some other information about a patient's disease. I know my duty is to learn things, but I just feel that my preceptor does not always take her responsibility seriously...

The nurse preceptor can play a crucial role in creating an atmosphere that enables nursing students to learn about gerontological nursing in clinical placement.

LIMITATION:

Participants for the study were not picked randomly but instead decided to accept a general invitation distributed to eligible students to participate. The use of purposive sampling has the potential to introduce bias. The small number of participants constitutes another limitation although the sample included nearly the total population of fourth-year nursing students at the college.

III. CONCLUSION

Care for older patients involves a significant and increasing field of nursing, and geriatric facilities are considered as one of the placement areas for nursing students. It is evident in our study through the themes identified that creating an approachable learning atmosphere that achieves quality learning for the students' experience would be essential. The communication skills among students, the college, and the clinical placement staff exemplify a collaborative effort for a successful clinical placement experience.

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