

IMPACT OF STUDENT NURSES’ ON WORKLOAD OF MEDICAL-SURGICAL RNs IN A CRITICAL ACCESS HOSPITAL

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Explore RNs’ perceptions of the impact of student nurses’ clinical on the workload of medical-surgical RNs in a Critical Access Hospital (CAH).
Background: Nursing programs in rural areas often utilize rural hospitals, many of which are CAHs. CAHs have features and challenges that make their nurses’ work environment unique. With a shortage of clinical sites and the challenging work environment of RNs in CAHs, it is vital that nursing programs maintain a good relationship with these nurses. No studies have been reported specific to CAH, medical-surgical RNs and students.
Method: Mixed-method, descriptive, pilot study. The quantitative portion utilized a 38 item, electronic, adapted version of the Nursing Students’ Contributions to Clinical Agencies. The qualitative portion of the study utilized RN interviews, guided by semi-structured open-ended questions.
Population: A convenience sample of regularly scheduled, day-shift RNs on a medical-surgical unit of a Critical Access Hospital.
Setting: A rural Appalachian CAH.
Results: RNs perceived the impact of student nurses’ clinical as positive. RNs with less than 10 years of experience viewed students more positive than RNs with more than 10 years experience.
Conclusions: RN in this Critical Access Hospital perceived student nurses presence more favorably than nurses in previous studies in other hospitals types.

- The clinical learning environment is a valuable component of student nurses’ education.
- Nursing programs today face challenges with finding adequate clinical sites for their nursing students due to increased enrollments and competition for sites.
- Staff nurses face many challenges while working with students including: a shortage of staff, increased patient-to-nurse ratios; and high acuity patients. Staff nurses are often working with students more days of the week, have students of varying skill levels, and may work with students and instructors from various types of nursing programs.
- There are limited studies which explore the impact of student nurses’ clinical on the workload of RNs and none which address the perceptions of RNs working with student nurses in Critical Access Hospitals.
- Rural hospitals have less technology, fewer nurses per patients, nurses with less education, and serve populations with higher rates of major chronic diseases.
- This study focused on student clinical experience, not preceptor or capstone experience.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Given the shortage of clinical sites and challenging work environment of nurses in rural CAHs it is vital that nursing programs, especially clinical nursing instructors, maintain a good relationship with CAH nurses to ensure a positive environment for students and staff.
The PICOT format utilized for the literature review was:

- **population** - nurses on a medical-surgical unit of a CAH
- **intervention** - presence of nursing students
- **comparison** - days with no nursing students
- **time** - not applicable to this project

DESCRIPTION & DESIGN

A pilot study utilizing a mixed-method, descriptive design.
Quantitative study consisted of an adaptation of the 53 item Nursing Students’ Contribution to Clinical Agency (NSCCA) tool developed by Grindel et al. (2001) with a Cronbach’s alpha of .95. Attempts to gain permission for utilization of the NSCCA were unsuccessful but an adapted, 37 items survey was distributed electronically.
The survey had 7 demographic items and 29 Likert Scale items ranging from (0) strongly disagrees, to (4) strongly agrees. The final item is a global indicator of nurses’ perceptions of students’ contributions to the clinical agency ranging from (-5) extremely negative to (+5) extremely positive.
Qualitative study consisted of individual RN interviews.
Institutions Review Board approval was obtained from Otterbein University.
Informed consent was obtained from all participants before participation in either the electronic survey or the RN interviews.

OUTCOMES & EVALUATIONS

Quantitative::

Participants - RNs (N=10) female

Ranging in age from 23 to 55 (M=38.5, SD=11.43)

Years of nursing experience ranging from 1 year to 28.5 years (M=8.25, SD=8.54)

Years of medical-surgical experience ranged from 1 to 12 years (M=4.35, SD=4.06)

All started as ADN grads

2 current BSN; 1 MSN

Clinical groups on unit - ADN from one nursing program

Qualitative:

Participants - RNs (N=4) who also completed the electronic survey

Theme - RNs have positive perception of students

Concepts: Students are helpful
Instructor is resource
Communication is effective
Allow RNs time for other tasks

Theme – RNs lack confidence as role models

Concepts: Body language exhibited lack of confidence as role model
Difficulty identifying qualities of role models
Little education regarding role modeling

Table 1. Positive worded items: The higher the M & SD the more participants agreed with the item regarding student nurses			Table 2. Negative worded items: The higher the M & SD the more participants agreed with the item regarding student nurses		
Item	M	SD	Item	M	SD
rate student nurses’ contribution to the clinical agency on a score of -5 extremely negative to +5 extremely positive	3,9	0,99	problem students can be frustrating	2.5	0.53
allow opportunities for mentoring	3.7	0.48	are less assertive with important patient therapies	1.7	1.06
are able to assist with patient care	3,7	0.48	add to the confusion and noise on the unit	1.2	0.79
interact with patients and families	3,6	0.69	make staff insecure about their knowledge and skills	1.1	0.74
become a source of recruitment	3,6	0.52	allow cost containment by decreasing overtime pay	1.1	0.74
allow for reciprocal learning	3,6	0.52	do not appreciate support of staff nurses	0.8	0.75
allow nurses to participate in student’s professional development	3.5	0.53	impede the sharing of ideas	0.8	0.79
stimulate staff intellectually	3.5	0.53	take too much staff time	0.8	0.63
provide individualize support and care for patients	3.4	0.52	spend less time with patients	0.7	0.48
enhance the clinical setting as a learning environment	3.4	0.52	threaten professional role development	0.7	0.48
instructor is a resource for clinical decision making	3.3	0.48	are unable to contribute to the treatment plan	0.6	0.52
nurses enjoy teaching students	3.0	0.67			
participation empowers nurses	2.9	0.60			
allow staff time to do extras	2.8	1.03			
challenge staff to remain proficient	2.8	1.03			
contribute to unit’s standards of practice by increasing staff’s awareness of current policies and procedures	2.8	0.92			
give staff respite from difficult patients	2.0	2.0			

Table 3. SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Do you have any issues such as communication? Do the instructors communicate effectively?	(Nurse 3) “I feel like they do”. (Nurse 4) “They are very good at communicating with us”.
What recommendations, if any, do you have to improve the working relationship between the nursing students, their instructors and the staff?	(Nurse 1) “Just don’t be afraid to ask questions”. (Nurse 2) “I think everybody’s great at what they are doing and I can’t think of anything to make it better”. (Nurse 3) “I don’t really have anything, no I feel like it is set up pretty well”.
On an average day, when you come into the facility and you find you are going to have students and they are going to be helping your patients. How does that make you feel?	(Nurse 1) “I’m excited. Because especially like I said today. If I have 5 or 6 patients it helps so much”. (Nurse 2) “I mean it’s like oh it’s great you know if they help me do this, I can do that”. (Nurse 3) “Usually I feel relieved. It kind of relieves my workload”. (Nurse 4) “Happy. I’d be hoping you guys have some of mine”.

CONCLUSION

- RNs were less ambivalent regarding student nurses’ clinical than in previous studies.
- Overall RNs perceived students’ presence as helpful.
- RNs perceived communication between staff, instructors, and students as appropriate and effective.
- RNs in the CAH struggled with describing themselves as role models and identifying qualities of effective role models.
- Findings from this pilot study, while not statistically significant, supports previous research into nurses’ perceptions of student nurses’ clinical; RNs with <10 years of experience perceived students more positive than did RNs with >10 years of experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Nursing programs should give consideration to the manner in which clinical instructors conduct student clinical experience. Considering the impact on RN workload could increase availability of clinical sites and improve RN response to students.
- Hospitals should give consideration to the impact of multiple nursing programs and students on the workload of their RNs. Everyone may benefit from nurses who feel less stressed and over-worked.
- Training for RNs regarding their impact as role models.
- Studies utilizing multiple CAHs to increase sample size.
- Studies comparing the impact of students from multiple programs on RN workload.

REFERENCES

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