Experiences of faculty and staff nurses working with nursing students during clinical placement in residential aged care facilities

Recommendations*

- A formal practice agreement is recommended between the academic affiliate / institution and the residential aged care facility (RACF). The agreement should clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of each partner, mutual goals, and student and staff requirements. (Grade A)

- Academic institutions should assign faculty with specific interest and expertise in RACF settings to motivate and increase learning opportunities for students during RACF placements. (Grade B)

- Placement of nursing students within an RACF setting should be planned prior to the student nurse commencing clinical placement. Planning involves ensuring faculty have interest and knowledge in the RACF setting, ensuring resources are in place, and communicating the course objectives with the relevant staff of the RACF. (Grade A)

*Definition of JBI's Grades of Recommendation

Information source

This Best Practice Information Sheet is a summary of evidence derived from a systematic review published in 2022 in JBI Evidence Synthesis.[1]

Background

The importance of clinical placement and contextualizing theory into practice for nursing students is well-established. It is an essential component of nursing education and involves the student nurse working with the staff nurse in their usual clinical setting, such as hospitals, community, home care, or RACFs. A positive learning experience for the student nurse depends on staff nurses and faculty who have strong clinical skills, are adaptable, act as role models, are able to support and teach student nurses in their clinical setting, share patient care, relinquish care responsibilities, ensure patient care needs are met, and provide constructive feedback. This places demand on staff nurses and can cause frustration and stress, which can compromise mentorship and teaching in the clinical setting, resulting in a negative learning experience for the student.

Gerontological nurse specialists must comprehensively understand aging and the complexities of care required for older adults. With a growing population of older adults and an increase in the need for well-educated nurses in gerontological care, it is essential that nursing students receive clinical experience that focuses on the care of older adults. RACFs, therefore, provide ideal clinical exposure for nursing students.

Objectives

The purpose of this Best Practice Information Sheet is to present the best available evidence on the experiences of faculty and staff nurses working with nursing students during clinical placement in RACFs. The review explored how faculty and staff facilitate learning for nursing students on clinical placement in RACFs, as well as the facilitators and barriers to student learning as experienced by faculty and staff.

Phenomena of interest

The phenomena of interest in the systematic review were the experiences of faculty and staff nurses working with student nurses during clinical placement in RACFs.

Quality of the research

All included papers were assessed by two independent reviewers using the standardized JBI critical appraisal tool for qualitative research. A total of six studies were included in the review and underwent methodological quality assessment. Three studies used qualitative design with interviews, one used mixed methods with qualitative phenomenology, one used grounded theory, and one used descriptive exploratory design. Only qualitative evidence was incorporated into this review. The quality of the studies was assessed as moderate to high in five out of six studies (ranged from 7-10 out of 10 on critical appraisal scores), and one study was assessed as low (4 out of 10).
Findings

All included studies were written in English, originating in the United States (n=2), Australia (n=2), United Kingdom (n=1), and Sweden (n=1). Four studies focused on the experiences of staff nurses only, one on the experiences of faculty, and one on the experiences both faculty and staff nurses. More than 97 participants were included although one study did not report number of participants. The identified participants were described as registered nurses with precepting experience, clinical expert staff nurses in a clinical instructor role, RACF staff, staff members, nurse managers, and nurse educators. A total of 32 findings (31 unequivocal and one credible) were extracted and grouped into nine categories, and four synthesized findings were generated.

Synthesized finding 1: Students enhance the environment. Staff found students to be role models, inspiring new ideas and bringing fresh perspectives to the workplace. Staff were prompted to reflect on their own practice and, in some instances, make professional changes or advancements. The presence of students invigorated staff and residents, improving resident care during the student's clinical placement.

Synthesized finding 2: Effort is required by faculty and staff to make the experience work. Inexperienced students can require a great deal of direction and supervision, and if the effort is invested into the student's learning experience, this is seen as a positive investment into future practitioners. Faculty and staff noted that some students did not see value in RACF clinical placement and felt they were being compared to nurses in acute care hospital environments.

Synthesized finding 3: RACFs provide rich learning experiences. Faculty and staff appreciated the learning opportunities such as nursing fundamentals, assessments, communication, holistic care, understanding end-of-life care, and understanding the context of aged care within healthcare. Faculty and staff also appreciated the opportunity to demonstrate the complexity of care and level of responsibility nurses have in aged care.

Synthesized finding 4: Importance of an RACF-academic partnership. There is a need for commitment by all partners, inclusive of the academic affiliate, the RACF as an organization, and the faculty and staff, to work together. Staff also expressed the need for clear objectives from the academic affiliate to ensure students are exposed to relevant clinical practice that allows transference from theoretical knowledge, creating a positive experience for the students, RACF staff, and academic faculty staff.

Conclusions

The findings from the systematic review highlight the importance for faculty and staff in RACFs who work with student nurses in clinical placement to have interest, knowledge, and appreciation for the complexities of the environment and the many learning opportunities available for the development of student nurses. Staff have an important role in mentoring nursing students and should be supported by the faculty and the academic affiliate with a well-articulated agreement that reflects mutual goals and expectations.

Implications for practice

This review identified three recommendations from the four synthesized findings for nursing practice and education. It is recommended that 1) academic institutions should assign faculty of RACFs who are interested and passionate in the clinical learning potential for student nurses; 2) careful planning is needed by RACF faculty prior to the student nurse commencing clinical placement, including knowing who will be assigned to work with the students, identifying the course objectives, and ensuring resources are in place, all of which are then communicated with relevant RACF staff; and 3) a formal practice agreement between the academic affiliate and the RACF should be in place to clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of each partner, mutual goals, and student and staff requirements.
EXPERIENCES OF FACULTY AND STAFF NURSES WORKING WITH NURSING STUDENTS DURING CLINICAL PLACEMENT IN RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE FACILITIES

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Translating theory into practice through clinical placement is essential for student nurses.
- Gerontological nurses must comprehensively understand aging and its complexity of care.
- Faculty (academic staff) and staff nurses of residential aged care facilities (RACFs) experience facilitators and barriers when providing mentorship to student nurses.
- Understanding the staff and faculty’s experiences of mentoring student nurses (or working with the student nurses on clinical placement) may provide insight into the facilitators and barriers as experienced by the faculty and staff.

POPULATION
- Nursing students undertaking RACF placement
- Academic faculty
- Clinical staff

SETTING
- Residential aged care facility

SYNTHESIZED FINDINGS

1. STUDENTS ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENT
Clinical staff appreciate the energy, ideas and inquisitive approach
- Their own professional development can be enhanced
- Workload is perceived to be lighter

2. EFFORT IS REQUIRED BY FACULTY AND STAFF TO MAKE THE EXPERIENCE WORK
Student nurses did not view the RACF placement as a valuable learning experience, and planning and motivation from staff and academic faculty are required
- Despite the additional work student placements create, it is seen as an investment in developing future practitioners

3. RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE FACILITIES PROVIDE RICH LEARNING EXPERIENCES
- Residential aged care placements offer learning opportunities
- Placements enhance future relationships between RACFs and hospitals

4. IMPORTANCE OF A RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE FACILITY-ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP
- A collaborative approach is required to create a positive experience for faculty and staff when working with students

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

PRACTICE AGREEMENT
- A formal practice agreement is recommended between the academic affiliate / institution and the RACF. The agreement should clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of each partner, mutual goals, and student and staff requirements.

MOTIVATE STUDENTS
- Academic institutions should assign faculty with specific interest and expertise in RACF settings to motivate and increase learning opportunities for students during RACF placements.

PLANNED PLACEMENT
- Placement of nursing students within an RACF setting should be planned prior to the student nurse commencing clinical placement. Planning involves ensuring faculty have interest and knowledge in the RACF setting, ensuring resources are in place, and communicating the course objectives with the relevant staff of the RACF.
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References

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