

Research Article

Perceptions of nursing students on effective clinical preceptors in Phnom Penh National Hospitals, Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nursing education has evolved substantially in the last few decades. Preceptorship is important to nursing education for several reasons. The purpose of this study is to describe the effective nursing clinical preceptors in Phnom Penh National Hospitals. Both preceptors and students have reported experiencing constrained relationships, tension and anxiety, which led to failure result or frustrating experiences in clinical teaching and learning.

Methods: The stratified sampling of 166 was invited. A cross-sectional design survey was used. The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for all items was 0.945.

Results: The findings were given as effective clinical preceptorship had a moderate (3.02, 0.85). The interpersonal relationship (3.51, 0.88), evaluation (3.39, 0.93), personal traits (2.80, 0.83), nursing competencies (3.39, 0.93), and teaching ability (2.70, 0.81).

Conclusion: Interpersonal relationship, formative evaluation, giving suggestions and correcting mistakes without belittling was perceived to be important characteristic. It is necessary to integrate clinical teaching skills to clinical preceptors.

Keywords: Nurse clinical preceptors, Effective clinical teaching behaviors, Cambodian nursing students

INTRODUCTION

Nursing education has evolved substantially in the last few decades. While pre-registration nursing education aims to prepare knowledgeable, competent practitioners.¹ Education models grounded in behaviourism have given way to those based on feminism, phenomenology and humanism. The humanistic curriculum models is based on the notion that the development of self-directed, confident professionals with well-developed communication skills is as important to the development of a beginning practitioner as the acquisition of psychomotor skills.² The clinical learning environment remains the single most important resource in the development of competent, capable, caring nurses.²

Despite the need for effective clinical education, the criteria for determining effective clinical teaching remain poorly defined³ and the role of the nurse teacher lacks clarity.⁴ Clearly, there is urgent and compelling need to gain better understanding of what constitutes effective clinical teaching and to explore the impact of the clinical environment on student's learning. Preceptorship is important to nursing education for several reasons: it assists nursing students to incorporate theory into practice, integrates students into the practice setting within the organization, allows the student to apply learning and internalize the role and values of the profession within a nurturing and supportive relationship, and assists in recruiting nursing students into the profession.⁵

The scope of this study only involves the clinical nurse preceptors in selected national hospitals in Phnom Penh. These selected hospitals are accessible to the researcher. In the local context, Cambodian clinical preceptors are the ones who provide direct and indirect nursing care, teach nursing students, and they also work in the field of health restoration, prevention, rehabilitation, and health promotion.

Nursing education occurs in four main settings: classrooms, seminars, skills laboratories and clinical areas calling for different pedagogical approaches.⁶ Preceptorship is important to nursing education for several reasons: it assists nursing students to incorporate theory into practice, integrates students into the practice setting within the organization, allows the student to apply learning and internalize the role and values of the profession within a nurturing and supportive relationship, and assists in recruiting nursing students into the profession.^{5,7}

In Cambodia's nursing educational system, nurse clinical preceptors are fully responsible for clinical teaching of nursing students, which take place in all the three clinical settings mentioned above. It is different from other countries in terms of clinical practice of the students. Preceptors attend a one-week training, and they are taught specifically in teaching methodologies, supervision of the students, and checking student's logbook. After the training, the Minister of Health nominates them as clinical preceptors. The purpose of this study is to describe the effective nursing clinical preceptors in Phnom Penh National Hospitals.

Statement of the research problem

Both preceptors and students have reported experiencing constrained relationships, characterized by tension and anxiety. Such relationships result in failure and frustrating experiences in clinical teaching and learning.⁸ Not understanding the relationship that leads to being unable or unwilling to do the work. This could lead to a difficult working relationship, with the preceptor's negative observations impacting the opinions of other staff members before they have an opportunity to form their own impressions through direct contact. Perceptions of unfair treatment by nursing faculty leads to student nurses voicing their concerns, leaving a program or conforming to the situation to avoid failure.⁹

In 2007, the Cambodian Ministry for Health^{10,11} developed the educational improvement services in the pursuit of quality nursing education for all types of nursing education programs. The MoH is dedicated to excellence in nursing education, and clinical nurse preceptors. However, this efforts can't achieve. This present study is a first attempt to approach the level of perceptions of nursing students on clinical preceptor in national hospitals in Cambodia by using Nursing Clinical Teacher Effectiveness Inventory (NCTEI) to describe

the effective nursing clinical preceptors in Phnom Penh National Hospitals.

Literature review

A study stress the importance of defining characteristics of effective clinical teachers because of the nature of the clinical setting.¹² Clinical teacher effectiveness has been a popular area of study in nursing, however, many researchers have relied on Nursing Clinical Teacher Effectiveness Inventory (NCTEI).¹² A seminal research into clinical teacher effectiveness was based on retrospective audits of student's evaluations of their clinical teachers within a single university setting.¹³ The NCTEI is a 48-item, seven-point-scale comprising a checklist describing discrete teacher characteristics, grouped in five subscales: teaching ability, interpersonal relationships, personality traits, nursing competence, and evaluation.

This is divided into sub-concepts: teaching ability, nursing competence, evaluating, interpersonal relationships, and personality traits. Nursing Competence, Nursing is a practice-based discipline and is measured in terms of clinical competence.¹⁴ Interpersonal Relationships, Interpersonal relationships describe the state of reciprocal interest and communication between two or more people. Interpersonal relationships do not include therapeutic relationships.¹² Personality Traits, Personality traits include instructor attitudes, emotional tendencies, and character traits.¹⁵ Teaching Ability, Teaching ability is the process of transmission of skills and attitudes; the creation of an environment that enables learning.¹² Teaching ability includes instructional skills, creating a positive learning environment, and promoting learning.^{15,16} Evaluation, Students' value guidance and feedback without feeling the instructor is belittling them.¹⁶ Evaluation is the type and amount of feedback the student receives from the teacher regarding clinical performances and written assignments.¹²

Based on a study asked students and faculty to identify the characteristics of clinical instructors they believed to be important to student learning outcomes.¹⁷ An article suggested that good teachers create positive relationships with students, are professional role models, and provide students with interpersonal support.¹⁶ The potential source of perceived faculty weakness may be limited formal preparation in the teaching role. Further research is needed to explore faculty whose education included courses in teaching methods compared to those who lack this background.^{16,18,19} Responsibilities of nursing instructors include ensuring that students learn theory, gain clinical experience, practice techniques, and develop into knowledgeable nurses. Clinical nursing faculty possesses four categories of important qualities: professional competence, interpersonal relationship, personality characteristics, and teaching ability.¹⁵

A study proposed to develop perceptions the characteristics of effective and ineffective instructors

early in their educational careers to identify characteristics used to label instructors as effective or ineffective, and two questions about the grading techniques and individual coursework.²⁰ Concept analysis consisted of four steps: (a) students' written descriptions were read to obtain a feel for their overall responses, (b) significant statements and phrases pertaining directly to the questions were extracted, (c) categories were formulated from these significant statements and phrases, and (d) categories were clustered into the 10 most frequently occurring themes.²⁰ Another interesting study examined clinical teaching as vital for the development of student nurses; however, criteria for effective clinical teachers are undefined and often unreliable. Many studies were and conducted to explore the perceived characteristics of effective clinical educators as rated by students and educators,^{14,21} and the significant differences and commonalities between these perceptions.^{2,14,22-24}

METHODS

Research design: A descriptive cross-sectional survey was used to explore student nurses' perceptions of an effective clinical preceptor.

Population and sampling: The three largest nursing schools based in the capital city of Phnom Penh included the Technical School for Medical Care (TSMC) representing the four other regional training centers around the country, the Chenla University (CU) and International University (IU) representing the private universities. A stratified random sampling was applied in this study. Invitations were extended to 200 students to participate in the study. There were 175 surveys returned with 166 valid questionnaires representing 83% return rate.

Instrumentation: The Nursing Clinical Teacher Effectiveness Inventory¹³ were sought permission from the authors. The 47-item of perceptions of characteristics of each item against the categorized five main subscales of: Teaching ability, evaluation, interpersonal relationship, personality traits, and nursing competence on which respondents rated instructors used of clinical nursing preceptors' behaviours on a five point Likert scale. The 47 teaching behaviours were ranked on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Analysis of data. Descriptive statistics (Mean, SD, and Frequency) were used to analyse study variables and to determine which characteristics students and faculty perceive as important in order for clinical nurse preceptors to be effective.

RESULTS

Demographic information about the sample is displayed in the table below. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 27 years old. There were fifty-eight percent of participants belonging to the 18 to 22 years age range.

Mean age was 1.41 and SD = 0.49, which are considered to be consistent with third and fourth year of nursing students attending nursing school. Participants were composed of 52% females and 48% male. The majority of participants had spent their clinical experiences at medicine about 45%, 21% at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and 20% at surgery wards. Majority of participants' year level was third year nursing program, which was composed of 87%; and fourth year nursing program was only 13%. In addition, nursing students at ADN's program was 54%, and BSN's program was 46%.

Table 1: Summary of demographic profile of respondents.
(n=166)

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percent	
Age (in years)	18-22	97	58
	23-27	69	42
	28-32		
	Total	166	100%
Gender	Female	80	52
	Male	86	48
	Total	166	100
Program	ADN	89	54
	NNurse		
	BSN leader	77	46
	Total	166	100
Year level (in years)	3 rd Year	144	87
	4 th Year	22	13
	Total	166	100%
Universities	TSMC	49	30
	Chenla	60	36
	IU	57	34
	Total	166	100

* = Khmer-Soviet Friendship Hospital, * = National Pediatric Hospital, * = Center of Hope Hospital * = Kossamak Hospital, * = Municipal Hospital, * = Calmette Hospital, * = Ang Duong Hospital * = Kunthabopha Hospital

Nursing Clinical Teaching Effectiveness Inventory

The table below presents selected measures of central tendency and dispersion of characteristics rated by nursing students as effective clinical preceptorship. The interpersonal relationship domain ranked the highest of perceptions (Mean = 3.51; SD = 0.88) followed by evaluation (Mean = 3.39; SD = 0.93), personality trait (Mean = 2.80; SD = 0.87), and nursing competencies respectively. Moreover, the teaching ability had lowest score (Mean = 2.70; SD = 0.81). In terms of mean scores obtained, nursing students consider interpersonal relationship as the most effective feature of clinical preceptorship. This is followed by evaluation, personality trait, nursing competencies, and teaching ability with moderate to low mean ratings.

Table 2: Measures of central tendency and variability of the features of effective clinical preceptorship. (n=166)

No.	Constructs	Mean	SD
1	Teaching ability	2.70	0.81
2	Nursing competencies	2.74	.77
3	Evaluation	3.39	.93
4	Interpersonal relationship	3.51	.88
5	Personality trait	2.80	.87
Total		3.028	0.852

DISCUSSION

These moderated results can be because of Cambodian nursing students answered based on their reflection with the real situation where they have practiced with nurse clinical preceptors. It does not mean Cambodian nursing students do not value behaviour that contribute to clinical effectiveness but they based their ratings on the clinical preceptors they currently have. The clinical teaching is the heart of the nursing's professional program and it remains the single most important resource in the development of competent, capable, caring nurses.^{1,25}

First category interpersonal relationship, as regarded to the relationship between the nurse clinical preceptors and their students in the clinical settings as an effective clinical teaching characteristic, the findings of present study stated that, students perceive this characteristic as an important effective teaching behaviours. They need to approach nurse clinical preceptor when they have some problems or cannot perform a task properly and environment of respect between nurse clinical preceptor and nursing students. Other papers stated that student nurses have ranked relationships as the third most important category.^{26,27}

The second category, evaluation, is very important for nursing students since specific suggestions for improvement, and feedback on students' performance were valued importantly. Nursing is a practice-based discipline²⁸ in which clinical evaluation plays a crucial role. Clinical evaluation is one of the complex tasks of faculty and health instructors²⁹ and a challenge for nursing and other health professions.³⁰ In this study, moderate rank of evaluation of nurse clinical preceptors was still be limited to make clinical requirements of nursing students such as interpersonal communications, problem-solving, and professional tendencies.

The third category was personality, nursing students valued self-confidence most importantly. This trait in teachers can make students brave. They learn to trust on nurse clinical preceptors that can be lead to fear of poor performance during practicum. Although the Cambodian educational culture normally adapts a more formal approach to teaching and learning, the trend maybe that by this time, the nursing students are now used to the

clinical setting and are more clinically confident and knowledgeable. In other countries such as the UK and Australia, clinical competence and clinical credibility of nurse teachers have been the focus of much debate.³¹

Fourth category, teaching ability, nursing students need help to organize their thoughts about patients' problems. Because nursing students are not familiar with hospital environment, they are afraid of touching patients, cannot accurately assess these patients and have difficulty formulating the nursing diagnosis. A paper stated that learning in the clinical setting required knowledgeable and experienced clinical instructors with the ability to teach adult learners effectively.²⁸ In the present study, the nursing students wanted the nurse clinical preceptors to be knowledgeable and competent in their own field and agree that knowledge and experience competence because of the nursing students wanted to spend their clinical training with specialized clinical preceptor.

The final category nursing competence, nurse clinical preceptor knows how to function in clinical practice and can guide students in developing their clinical competencies. Another study found in her study that, the participants of nursing students thought that the nurse clinical preceptors should demonstrate clinical skills, actively participate in clinical practice to help students to identify and make use of practice opportunities.³²

Further ideas, when students are in clinical practice, they are under a great deal of stress.³³ First, they are worried about making mistakes due to inadequate knowledge and skills. Second, they are afraid that the patients and their families will not accept a nursing student.^{34,35} Third, they have to face the primary nurse and other team members, who may evaluate or even criticize their performance. In these circumstances, the preceptor's supportive and friendly attitudes are extremely important to the students.

Clinical preceptors are anxious concerning students' practice such a workload and responsibility can cause clinical preceptors burnout,³⁶ which leads to negative attitudes, rather than an encouraging demeanour. Therefore, the best clinical preceptor is one who is a role model for the students and who establishes a relationship of mutual respect with the students.¹⁵ Possibly the Cambodian nursing students' unique cultural background, educational beliefs, values, and practices as they are significant variation of gender differences in perceptions with regard to nurse clinical preceptors with nursing students.

CONCLUSIONS

Nursing students valued interpersonal relationship with the nurse clinical preceptor and considered this to be most important characteristic of clinical preceptors. Formative evaluation, giving suggestions and correcting mistakes without belittling them was likewise perceived to be important characteristic. Their personality, too,

especially self-confidence was important. Clinical teaching abilities and nursing competence were given moderate ratings by respondents.

These findings provide grounds for looking at clinical teaching in a new light. These findings provide impetus for all nurse clinical preceptors to examine their own practice. Opportunities to implement effectiveness of clinical teaching that are most effective should be seized at every possible juncture. Nursing education as an entity must examine curricula and orientation programs for preceptors that incorporate evidence-based practices for clinical teaching. These actions will maximize opportunities for nursing students to learn, and therefore to succeed in becoming professional nurses.

Recommendation on nursing education

It is vital that teaching strategies that are most effective be utilized. Nurse educators should use the NCTEI as a self-assessment and seek to incorporate behaviours not previously used, or used infrequently, into their practice. Incorporation of the tool into routine teacher evaluation could serve to be a valuable strategy to enhance the quality of clinical teaching in nursing.

The findings of this study provide evidence that should be used in the education of future educators. Nursing is a practical and applied science and the time is overdue for nursing education curricula to reflect the primacy of practice in the preparation of nurse educators. Graduate programs for nurse educators should include courses on clinical education into their curricula. Graduate students in nursing education should use the results of this study, and others related to clinical teaching, as a basis from which to advance the body of evidence on clinical teaching.

Further recommendation is for nurse clinical preceptors to act as role models for their students, whether for nursing students, seasoned graduate students, preceptors, or novice preceptors. Role modelling is especially important during clinical experiences where students learn how to relate to patients, assess the situation, and make decisions. A paper described several role-modelling behaviors that are important for clinical faculty members, including asking questions, reporting data to staff, professional ethics, leadership, mentorship, and interacting with physicians.³⁷ Finally, the results of this study would be very helpful in the orientation of novice nurse educators. Consequently, expert nurses with graduate credentials in other areas of emphasis, such as administration and nurse practitioner, are hired to the role of educator and unleashed on nursing students. However, to achieve excellence in nursing education, it is imperative that extensive orientation to the principles and evidence-based practices of clinical teaching be incorporated.

Recommendation on nursing administration

Nurse administrators must support and facilitate nurse clinical preceptor to provide in practical environment for both preceptors and students. Nurse managers work closely with clinical preceptors to focus on patient outcomes rather than on completion of tasks in order to protect patients' safety. In addition, the paid internships or other mechanisms are in place to help students' transition to the registered nurse roles. Nurse managers must estimate numbers of nursing students each year, who are came to practice each settings, therefore it will plan effectively to drive future planning in terms of practical materials.

It is suggested that the orientation of new nurse clinical preceptors in nursing education should consist of a comprehensive overview of the curriculum, evaluation process as well as clinical teaching, before they begin teaching in clinical setting. The proposed orientation program could comprise of a one-day workshop every month. The workshop should address the clinical teaching, assessment and feedback could be detailed and new nurse clinical preceptors be given opportunities to practice during the workshop.

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