

Dedicated Education Units: Evaluation of Innovative Clinical Learning Environments for Undergraduate Nursing Students

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Introduction

Nursing educators have been negotiating the shortages of clinical learning environments for undergraduate nursing students. Innovative methods have been used to resolve the question of where nursing students can practice their skills. A need to strengthen the relationship between theory and practice and a shortage of nurse educators spurred innovation. One innovation implemented to address these issues was the introduction of the dedicated education unit (DEU).

Background

The DEU makes use of existing clinical sites and adapts them for optimal student learning.

Staff nurses are Clinician Instructors (CI) and educated in:

- adult teaching and learning
- promoting critical thinking,
- providing immediate feedback, overall evaluation
- the principle clinical objectives

The nurses not actively teaching

- take on a supportive role with the rest of the unit staff.

The school of nursing faculty members are the Clinical Faculty Coordinator (CFC)

- guide the CI
- provide professional development to the nursing student.

A typical medical-surgical unit (of 24- to 40-beds) can accommodate four to eight students during a six-week clinical rotation.

Methods

- Retrospective study
- Determined differences in student learning outcomes between clinical education in an acute care (AC) settings versus long-term care (LTC) settings
- Included course grades and standardized exam scores in Adult and Elder Health course series



Results

Description of the Sample –

- Majority of students female at the start of the undergraduate program.
- Mean age of the students at the start of the undergraduate program was 18.3 years.

Differences in Learning Outcomes –

- No differences in the learning course outcomes in students placed in AC versus long-term care LTC.
- AC student evaluation of clinical sites significantly higher than LTC evaluation of clinical sites.

Conclusion/Discussion

No significant differences in the learning outcomes in the Adult & Elder Health course regardless of clinical placement.

- This is significant for nursing education globally; it provides evidence for the expansion of clinical sites for certain courses.
- Worldwide, excellent clinical placements are at a premium.
- Nursing schools often have difficulty placing students in these environments
- Results of this study provide data for a forum for nurse educators and nurse clinicians to discuss opportunities for alternative clinical placements.
- Evaluation strategies for these clinical environments can be designed.
- Interestingly, students rated the AC clinical site higher than the LTC site. Generally students like the experience of AC rather than LTC; results of this study may be provided to students when discussing student experiences in different clinical placements with them.
- All student clinical placements in this study were on Dedicated Education Units (DEU); results must be limited to this clinical environment.

Recommendations for future research

- Expansion of this study to traditional clinical placements.
- Prospective longitudinal studies will help provide evidence on using alternative clinical environments for undergraduate education.

