

**Sigma's VIRTUAL 31st International Nursing Research Congress (Wednesday, 22 July - Friday, 24 July)**

## **A "Co-Creates" Framework to Foster a Positive Learning Environment for Students' Professional Development in Rwanda**

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### **Purpose:**

The future of the nursing profession and nursing practice in Rwanda depends on nursing students as a valuable future workforce. Preparing them to enter the profession as future nurses with necessary clinical competencies, values, and attitudes requires the practice-based learning environments and the educational programs within which students acquire these competencies to become more supportive and welcoming in facilitating their professional development. The aim of this study was to explore the ways beliefs, values, assumptions, practices, and behaviors enacted by staff nurses and nurse leaders within acute care practice environments, and clinical instructors and academic leaders in an educational institution within a resource limited context like Rwanda influence nursing students' professional development, and how the cultural aspects of these environments influence the development of nursing students as future nurses in professional practice.

### **Methods:**

Guided by a constructivist theoretical lens (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), this study used focused ethnography (Wall, 2015) to explore these culturally-bound perspectives as co-constructed by the above multiple stakeholders involved in the professional growth of students. Multiple methods were used to collect data, namely in-depth individual interviews with students, educators, staff nurses and nurse leaders, participant observation and document reviews.

### **Results:**

Findings from this study revealed that the acute care practice learning environment is a multifaceted entity (Newton, Henderson, Jolly, & Greaves, 2015), influenced by interconnected sets of beliefs, values, assumptions, behaviors and practices, intersecting at institutional, unit, and individual levels. Particularly, lack of optimal collaboration and partnership between practice environments and the academic program emerged as the root of barriers constraining these key stakeholders from creating and sustaining an enriched and positive environment to prepare students for professional practice.

These study findings illuminate that building and sustaining a nurturing and positive learning environment for nursing students' professional development requires a multifaceted approach that engages every concerned stakeholder in "co-creating" a learning culture which closes the existing gap between the desired learning environment and the actual enacted units' practices and behaviors (Papathanasiou, Tsaras, & Sarafis, 2014) towards students' professional growth. Based on these findings a "Co-

*CREATES*” framework grounded from relatively simple actions of collaboration, care, recognize, empower, actively-engage, transform, enhance and support was recommended. These actions are cost effective and invite people at the individual, the unit and the institutional levels to collaborate in co-creating workplace and learning environments that give access to resources, support and opportunities (Wiens, Babenko-Mould, & Iwasiw, 2014) to create and sustain a culture of learning in which every practice workplace environment is also a learning environment, and everyday nursing care is a learning moment in which expertise is shared, and opportunities for learning enhanced for both students, educators, and professional nurses.

**Conclusion:**

The positive outcomes stemming from such a collaborative approach can lead to a more effective future nursing workforce prepared to deliver safe patient care and to further enhance the Rwandan health care system. The framework can also be applied globally to further enhance students’ professional development and a positive culture of collaboration in nursing education and practice.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

Academic-practice partnership, Collaborative framework and Students’ professional development

**Abstract Summary:**

“Co-CREATES” is a collaborative framework that aims to build and sustain an empowering practice learning environment for nursing students. The framework is relevant to educators, clinicians, academic leaders, nurse leaders within practice settings and educational institutions who strive for a collaborative partnership in the preparation of students for professional practice.

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