

Developing Clinical Reasoning in Undergraduate Nursing Students: Strategies to Promote Success

Elizabeth Herron, PhD, RN, CNE
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte



Background

- ❑ Clinical reasoning has been defined as the process whereby nurses use clinical judgment and critical thinking to make decisions based on both knowledge and experience
- ❑ Pedagogical research in nursing education is essential for improving clinical nursing practice and ultimately patient outcomes
- ❑ Current research has focused on the development of clinical reasoning and its impact on the ability of new graduate nurses to practice safe and effective patient care in complex healthcare environments

Significance

- ❑ Safe and effective provision of patient care is vital to nursing practice and is enhanced when clinical reasoning is used to make patient care decisions
- ❑ Positive patient care outcomes result from well-educated nurses who have the ability to clinically reason through both emergent and non-emergent patient care situations to make sound clinical judgments
- ❑ The prevention of adverse patient outcomes directly relates to nurses' use of clinical reasoning and their ability to recognize and treat patient problems in a timely manner
- ❑ Exploration of methods to promote the development of clinical reasoning in pre-licensure nursing education is essential to ensure graduate nurses are prepared to provide safe and effective patient care

Interview Guide

Tell me about a situation during your nursing program where you used clinical reasoning to make a patient care decision.

Tell me about the teaching environments you have experienced in nursing school and which environment best helped you develop clinical reasoning.

Describe some specific examples of how your instructor(s) helped you to develop clinical reasoning.

Methods and Findings

- ❑ In this phenomenological study, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with eighteen participants who had recently graduated (within the last six months) or were in the final semester of their baccalaureate program
- ❑ Students' lived experiences during their pre-licensure education were explored to better understand what facilitated their development of clinical reasoning and enhanced their confidence in providing safe and effective patient care
- ❑ Five main themes were identified in the data:
 - ❑ Instructor Characteristics:
 - ❑ "One strategy, which was huge, was not making you feel stupid for having the wrong answer 'cause I think being so intimidated by your nursing instructor that you don't even want to guess the answer doesn't facilitate learning at all. I know a lot of students who just felt defeated."
 - ❑ Learning Environment:
 - ❑ "For learning [clinical] was great, because it was a small group. Being able to interact with each other, and the instructor, for more one on one. And have more responsibility for your knowledge."
 - ❑ Progression of Learning:
 - ❑ "It made sense now, this semester, when we were in clinical that all these things are connected to each other and you know one part and you know another part and somehow it comes together."
 - ❑ Importance of Clinical Reasoning:
 - ❑ "You have to be able to make decisions on your own. You have to use your nursing judgment – our professors use that phrase a lot – you have to be able to say, I can't ask anybody, "What should I do?" But you have to think safely, obviously, quickly, and what's going to be the best impact for the patient. I mean, it's difficult, it's hard, it's not necessarily basic instinct, definitely learned, but I would say it's absolutely vital to your success."
 - ❑ Best Place to Learn Clinical Reasoning:
 - ❑ "I mean with class you can only learn so much and even though you know everything you still don't know anything. And then simulation, there's only so much they can simulate in the lab. I think clinical had the most variety and the most different environments for a nurse, I guess, that you can't learn in the classroom or a simulation. So I think there should be more clinical aspects to nursing because every day after clinical, even though its not ours, I feel like I've learned so much rather than just sitting in class and hearing a teacher talk."

Discussion and Recommendations

- ❑ Participants overwhelmingly indicated that learner-centered teaching methods were more successful in promoting confidence and motivation to succeed in delivering safe and effective patient care
- ❑ Data indicated the clinical environment was the most beneficial environment in which to learn clinical reasoning
- ❑ Clinical reasoning should be promoted and facilitated by nursing faculty throughout nursing programs with an emphasis on learner-centered teaching strategies

Conclusion

- ❑ In order to prepare new graduate nurses for practice in the current complex healthcare environment, teaching and learning strategies must be reviewed and reconstructed to provide new nurses with the tools necessary to create positive patient care outcomes
- ❑ The Institute of Medicine (2010) has called for transformation in nursing education to prepare the next generation of nurses to be lifelong, active learners able to adjust and change with the ever-changing healthcare environment
- ❑ Continued exploration of nursing students' development of clinical reasoning is recommended to further enhance pre-licensure nursing students' preparation for practice

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Participant Demographics (N=18)

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	17	94%
Male	1	05%
Age		
Range	21-38 years	
Prior Degree	3	16%
Prior Healthcare Experience	11	61%