Collaborative Clinical Learning Environment for Nursing Students: Perspectives from Botswana

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BACKGROUND
A collaborative clinical learning environment plays an important role in preparing nursing students to working with diverse patient care team. A collaborative clinical learning environment in nursing education can be defined as an atmosphere where various professionals participating in patient care support and enhance one another such that patients’ needs are met, job satisfaction is enhanced and students learning is facilitated.

Students’ experiences of collaborative clinical learning environment
- Nurses kept students busy with simple errands
- Anxiety laden situations when students were minimally supervised
- cooperation and support they got from patients
- Unclear doctors’ prescriptions and eligible handwriting

PURPOSE
The objectives of the exercise were to determine (1) the value that health professionals have related to collaborative clinical learning environment, (2) the degree of their participation in creating and nurturing such an environment, (3) what they saw as facilitators and impediments of collaborative clinical learning environment in their workplace, and (4) the students’ experience of the collaborative clinical learning environment.

METHODS
Data was collected through an informal one-to-one dialogues guided by a set of questions.

RESULTS
Values that professionals attached to collaborative clinical learning environment participants reported valuing collaboration as it was important for a smooth flow of work, reduced the risk of errors and enhanced sharing of knowledge across disciplines and generations.

Effort and extent of creating and nurturing a collaborative clinical learning environment
Efforts to create and nurture a collaborative clinical learning environment were inconsistent: some staff members were reported to be supportive and others were not.

Barriers to collaborative clinical learning environment
- Work overload and shortage of staff
- Students’ focus specifically on assigned procedures
- Doctors’ demeaning attitude toward nurses
- Diploma-degree dichotomy

CONCLUSION
A collaborative clinical learning environment was valued by both students and staff across all professional patient care team members. However, key impediments to a collaborative learning environment included medical and nursing staff shortages, attitudes of some staff members and students and nursing’s multiple levels of entry into practice. Participants believed that both educational institutions and clinical settings had a role in enhancing a collaborative clinical learning environment therefore inter professional alliance should be intensely reinforced at an educational level.

The authors would like to acknowledge all the participants