IMPROVED PREPAREDENESS FOR PRACTICE: A SURVEY OF SENIOR NURSING STUDENTS

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BACKGROUND:

Students enrolled in undergraduate nursing studies are required to demonstrate the required knowledge base, critical thinking and technical skills, and exhibit professional behaviour of a beginning registered nurse. Several changes were introduced in an academic institution to address concerns about preparedness for nursing practice including: 1) formal skills testing; 2) a Self-Directed Learning laboratory (SDL Lab) with clinician support and 3) a remedial process (the Action Plan for Professional Practice – the APPP).

OBJECTIVE:

The aim of this study was to assess for changes in utilisation of strategies and confidence in professional practice in senior nursing students after the introduction of skills testing, the SDL Lab and remediation.

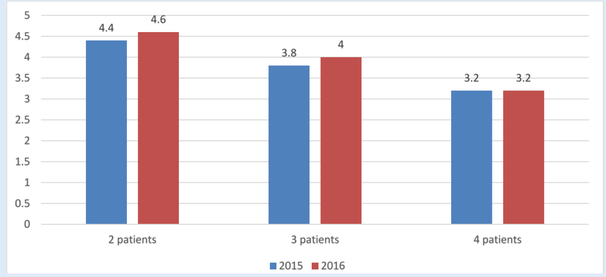
METHODS:

DESIGN: Descriptive study using a self-report survey over two consecutive years: 2015 and 2016.
SETTINGS: Melbourne, Australia.
PARTICIPANTS: Students enrolled in their final semester of study in a three-year undergraduate Bachelor of Nursing course.
METHODS: The survey was structured with three distinct sections: 1) Demographic/ Clinical Experience, 2) Preparation for Professional Practice; 3) Confidence in Practice. Data was analysed by descriptive/univariate analyses, with some thematic analysis of open-ended responses.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

Demographic Variable	2015		2016	
Continuous	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Age (years)	29.1	9.3	27.3	8.1
Hours of employment	22.0	10.8	20.9	8.5
Categorical	N	%	N	%
Female Gender	125	82.8%	112	88.2%
Country of Birth - Australia	79	53.4%	73	57.0%
Ethnicity - Oceania	58	40.0%	45	36.3%
Prior healthcare employment				
Patient Care Assistant	56	37.1%	38	29.7%
Enrolled Nurse – Aged Care	22	14.6%	12	9.4%
Enrolled Nurse – Acute Care	10	6.6%	16	12.5%
Other	9	6.0%	4	3.1%
Medication endorsement (Enrolled Nurse)	25	78.1%	27	96.4%
Current employment	115	77.2%	106	82.8%
Healthcare employment	78	67.8%	64	60.4%
Last placement – Medical and/or Surgical ward	95	62.9%	80	62.5%

Figure 1: Comparison of confidence in managing multiple patient care load



RESULTS:

- 279 students participated: 151 (2015), 128 (2016).
- More students attended the SDL Lab in 2016: 34% vs 53% (p=0.003).
- Confidence decreased as the patient load increased. Increased confidence was reported in 2016 for a 2-patient load (Fig. 1) (Mean: 4.4 vs 4.6, p=0.047).
- Confidence levels for a 2-patient load were affected by attendance to the SDL Lab (Mean: 4.4 vs 4.6; p=0.027) and previous healthcare employment (Mean: 4.4 vs 4.6; p=0.033).
- Confidence in caring for 4-patient load was positively affected by previous healthcare employment (Mean: 3.0 vs 3.5; p=0.002).
- Half of the participants reported low confidence performing venepuncture.
- 167 provided a response to the open-ended question, 'What could be done to help you feel more prepared to enter the nursing profession after graduation from this nursing course?'
- Three main themes were identified:
  1) Increase opportunities to practice clinical skills,
  2) Enhance supervision and education during the workplace experience, and
  3) Reduce focus on theoretical concepts and related assessment tasks and more time on teaching practical skills.

CONCLUSIONS:

This study has found that confidence in practice increased after the introduction of skills testing, the SDL Lab and remediation the APPP).
Further research should explore the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing preparedness for professional practice for nursing students enrolled in undergraduate study.