Learning to be a Professional Nurse: Easier Said Than Done: A Principle-Based Concept Analysis

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Background: The concept of professionalism has been examined, defined, studied, and explored in many disciplines. Yet, its clear definition remains elusive, difficult to describe, and almost impossible to teach. According to Merriam-Webster (2017), the word professional is defined as follows: (a) relating to or characteristic of a profession; (b) engaged in one of the learned professions; (c) conforming to the technical or ethical standards of a profession, and (d) exhibiting a courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike manner in the workplace. Although this definition begins to describe characteristics of a profession, it does not provide substantial details for becoming a professional. It is also much more difficult to capture what it means to be professional with the inception of social media changing communication processes and online educational platforms. Yet, the professional nurse is essential to the quality and safety of patient care. Teaching undergraduate nursing students how to become a professional is imperative and important as well (Rose, Nies, & Reid, 2017). The impact of how professional identity is taught becomes entangled with the lack of clear definition of what professionalism is. There is conceptual confusion as to the meaning of professionalism. There is not a clear definition or understanding of professionalism in nursing or how to appropriately teach future nurses how to be a professional (Clickner, & Shirey, 2013; Ghadirian, Salsali, & Cheraghi, 2014; Mottian, 2014). Beyond this, determining the definition of professionalism will not equate with instilling professionalism (Fitzgerald, 2016).

Purpose: The purpose of this concept analysis was to explore professionalism and the ways in which nurse educators teach students to become professional nurses (Burford, Morrow, Rothwell, Carter & Illing, 2014; Clark, 2017).

Methods: Penrod and Hupcey (2005) developed a principle-based concept analysis, which will be used to determine the state of the science surrounding the concept Professionalism. The literature search described and examined both the most recent literature from nursing and other healthcare disciplines according to the criteria of epistemological, pragmatic, linguistic, and logical principles. Epistemologically, is the concept of professionalism clearly defined and well-differentiated from other concepts? Pragmatically, is the concept of professionalism applicable and useful within the scientific realm of inquiry? Has it been operationalized? Linguistically, is the concept of professionalism used consistently and appropriately within context? Finally, logically, does the concept of professionalism hold its boundaries through theoretical integration with other concepts? These questions have been answered and a confirmatory definition of professionalism explicated.

Results: The concept professionalism continues to be poorly understood in the healthcare education literature. Word usage, clarity of meaning, and perspective affects meaning and
ultimately adoption of many of the attributes. This concept analysis however revealed attributes that can be taught, reinforced, and evaluated that demonstrate what a professional is.

**Conclusions:** Educators have the important role of preparing the next generation of nurses. Preparing them to be professional will benefit patients, families, and ultimately, the healthcare community as quality care will increase, and job satisfaction will improve.

**Recommendations:** Strategies for successfully teaching future nurses to be professionals will be shared. Curricular changes will be suggested in order to ensure key attributes of professionalism are taught.

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Abstract Summary:

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Content Outline:

1. Introduction
   a. Lack of clarity on definition of professionalism
   b. Curricular confusion as to how it is taught to nursing students

2. Importance of teaching professionalism to future nurses for quality patient care

3. Principle-based concept analysis
   a. Epistemological perspective
   b. Pragmatic perspective
   c. Linguistic perspective
   d. Logical perspective

4. Findings from literature

5. Professionalism defined

6. Teaching strategies examined

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