

Lived Experiences of the Staff Nurses during First Six months of their Employment in a University Hospital, Kavre

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nursing is a profession within the health care sector focused on the care of individuals, families, and communities so they may attain, maintain, or recover optimal health and quality of life. Role transition is the natural phenomena among the professionals; however, the transition of newly graduated nurses into clinical practice is commonly perceived as stressful.

Methods: It is a phenomenological qualitative study. By adopting purposive sampling technique, 6 nurses were recruited in the study. In-depth interview, audio tape and field notes were maintained to collect data. Nursing leaders and nursing superintendent were also involved to get supplement data via interview and focus group discussion.

Results: Beginning a new job was really stressful to the new nurses. Feelings of inadequacy, fear of making errors at work, lack of competency and confidence and sudden loss of supervision from the instructors were the common sources of the stress. Four major themes; stressful initial days, leaving the nest, supporting work environment and hierarchical work pattern were emerged. The new graduates require formal orientation program, opportunities for professional development, provision of preceptors during initial days, warm and welcoming attitude among the seniors and supportive environment to help them easing a role transition.

Conclusions: In order to retain and recruit new nurses the findings obtained through triangulated data need to keep in mind by the nursing administrators, educators and managers in a health care setting. And this in turn ultimately results in enhanced patient care in the health care setting.

Keywords: employment; experiences; role transition; staff nurse.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is the diagnosis and treatment of human responses to health and illness. Nurse is the person who works to meet the health care and nursing needs of individual patients, their families and significant others. Role transition is defined as changing direction from one state to another and functioning in a different manner.¹ This is a key concept in the adaptation of newly qualified nurses to the staff nurse role.²

An inability to handle the intense working environment, advanced medical technology, and high patient acuity results new graduate nurse turnover ranges from 35%-60%⁴, results in a high personal toll to the nurse and a

high financial loss to the institution.³ In Nepal, there has been a high turnover of the nurses which negatively affects the standards of the nursing care.⁵ Resources are being spent to develop and implement strategies to attract and retain staff.⁶ Additionally, there needs to be increased awareness that nursing culture can influence recruitment and retention of new graduates.⁷

METHODS

A phenomenological, qualitative study design was selected to explore the experiences of staff nurses in transition period in Dhulikhel Hospital, Kathmandu University Hospital (DH, KUH), Kavre from December 2012 to June 2013. Research setting was five indoor

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units; obstetric and gynaecological ward, operation theatre, surgical ward, Intensive care unit and orthopedic and traumatology unit. By adopting purposive sampling technique, 6 nurses were recruited in the study. Although the researcher had proposed to include more sample, the data was saturated after the interaction with 6th participant. Before proceeding with data, administrative approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review committee, Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences (KUSMS).

In-depth interview was used to learn experiences of the new nurses. After obtaining written informed consent, audio tape was used during interview where field notes were also maintained. In order to get supplement data related to the new nurses, nursing leaders were also involved: a nursing superintendent was interviewed and focus group discussion was also conducted among 6 nursing incharges. In order to validate the information provided by the new nurse, the data obtained from the nursing leaders were triangulated. Collected data was transcribed in reference to field notes and tape recordings and was analyzed by using Collaizzi (1978) seven steps and Nvivo software.

RESULTS

Among the participants, the duration of work experience varied from one month to three months. All participants were females ranging from 20 to 21 years of age. All were unmarried and belonged to the Hindu religion. Five out of the 6 participants came from Newar ethnicity and remaining one from Brahmin ethnicity. All had completed a PCL nursing course 8 to 10 months before.

Four themes were identified from the different levels of analysis;

1. Stressful initial days
2. Leaving the nest
3. Supportive work environment
4. Hierarchical work pattern.

Beginning a new job was really stressful to all new nurses. They found they were not prepared for the real work setting with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Emotions which tended to be negative (fear, anxiety, nervous, scary) were spoken about more frequently by participants of this study.

“...I was very anxious as I have insufficient knowledge to practice competently. I didn’t know where things are or what to do. I felt lack of competency to handle the

emergency situations because I didn’t know where the different emergency equipments are situated and when and how to use them so I was doubt in my tactfulness”.

Two participants spoke of the transition from student to nurse about lack of self confidence as contributing greatly to their level of anxiety during the initial stages of their practice.

“I was scared regarding confidence, making errors, and adjusting to the workplace environment even though there are senior nurses to support us”.

Another three participants of the study found the cause of anxiety as being the fear of making errors.

“I found that I got a lot of responsibilities toward me. It was very scary to be responsible for patients, whatever good or errors happens at my work, the credit goes to me. So I had to be really careful at my work”.

The initial professional role transition of the nurses consists of a journey moving from the protected environment of academia or from the known role of a student to the unfamiliar or to the relatively less familiar role of professionally practicing nurse in a context of professional practice. This process goes through developmental and professional, intellectual and emotional, skill and role relationship changes, and contains within it experiences, meanings and expectations.

The transition shock has many facets to it, one being accountability. The participants identified that being accountable as the main differences between the staff nurse and student nurse role. The loss of the protection of clinical supervision by nursing instructors was also mentioned.

“...When I was student, senior sisters and our instructors were there to guide me, to correct me when I made any error during work but now I am all on my own. I now even have to supervise the nursing students so I need to be more careful and active to my work”.

Upon introduction to their clinical practice, the participants experienced relatively being more task focused and overloaded by ward routines.

“I felt pressurized to complete the ward routine, to the extent as constantly to finish the tasks routinely undertaken by one shift before the next shift came on duty”.

Among six participants in the study, four of them got informal and only two of them got formal orientation of the hospital, its rules and regulations, working units etc. These four participants experienced level of frustration

Table 1. Triangulation between In-depth Interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII) Concepts			
Concept	In-depth Interview	FGD	KII
Suggestions to ease the transition phase.	<p><u>Creating a welcoming work environment</u>: Healthy work cultures encourage practicing good self-care.</p> <p><u>Preceptorship</u>; important for creating a positive transition. ▲</p> <p><u>Appropriate advice and guidance</u> from senior staff and co-operative and supportive environment.</p> <p><u>Formal Orientation Program</u> ♣</p> <p><u>Opportunity for staff development</u>. ♥</p> <p><u>Constructive feedback</u> #</p>	<p><u>Continuous supervision</u> to the new nurses.</p> <p>The idea of <u>preceptorship</u> is the best. ▲</p> <p>Timely provision of <u>constructive feedback</u> on performance. #</p> <p>A unit <u>climate of open communication</u> is also equally important.</p> <p><u>Workplace orientation</u> ♣</p> <p>Staffs should be <u>self motivated and enthusiastic</u> to learn the new things.</p> <p><u>Assignment congruence</u>, i.e. not being given tasks beyond their sphere of competence</p> <p><u>Professional development</u>: continuing staff development opportunities. ♥</p>	<p>National:</p> <p>Provision of in-service further education.</p> <p>The teaching institute should be <u>well equipped</u>; students could learn better.</p> <p>The parents should not force their children to enroll in nursing without their interest.</p> <p>International:</p> <p>Provision of scholarships to the nurses, exchange programs with international nurses ♥</p> <p>Formal Orientation ♣</p>

Key:♥, ♣, ▲, # Symbols given to the similar concepts of three groups.

during the initial month of their introduction into clinical nursing practice. This led them to depend on others to know every routine of their units and hospital as a whole. The participants felt a great need of formal orientation of the unit, about the rules and regulations, mission & vision of the hospital, job description, salary or administrative procedures before starting their work to adjust well with the new working environment.

The characteristics of the work environment greatly influence in the experiences of the new graduates.

Almost all participants indicated multiple times that a welcoming and supportive work environment contributed positively to their transition into the professional nurse role.

“I found a welcoming atmosphere in the work setting - an atmosphere which I appreciated. I was encouraged to ask questions. I found nursing incharge and co-workers being good at giving feedback as well”.

Among six, two participants shared about the mixed emotions; experiencing feelings of anxiety and also

pleased to get a job which they were waiting for a long time.

“I was so happy and excited to get new job. I have waited for many months as I was selected for the waiting staff for this job but at the same time also was very nervous because it has been long time since I practiced in clinical area. But warm and welcoming environment at work helped me a lot to adjust well”.

All the participants in the study found the staffs in the ward were cooperative and supportive to them except one who found a tradition of “senior and junior” (distinctively symbolic and hierarchical culture that exposes them to dominant normative behaviors) at her work place.

In focus group discussion (FGD), three participants stated that the nurse turnover brought them many problems.

“We have to supervise them for six months. When they become competent, they leave their job. We need to orient them particularly about new machines and equipment and how to handle them. But when we have workload, we won’t be able to teach them each and

everything, and as a result there is mishandling of the machines and negligence at work by the new nurses”.

Two participants of FGD found that the new nurses have insufficient knowledge.

“New nurses have insufficient knowledge to practice competently and they make mistakes. Similarly they learn some faulty habits during their student period; they tend to follow it and do not want to change when they become staff.

However another two participants experienced it differently. They reported that new nurses are easy to handle. Statement that depicted positive experiences includes,

“The new nurses learn eagerly what we teach to them. They follow all the rules and regulations, are punctual at work and present good attitude and behavior”.

Two participants of the study suggested that continuous supervision should be provided and the idea of preceptorship is the best to strengthen the role transition of the new nurses. Similarly another participant focused on timely provision of constructive feedback on performance of the new nurses which will encourage them to learn and to perform better. According to her a unit climate of open communication is also equally important. Warm and welcoming attitude of the seniors and working environment for the new nurses was suggested by another participant.

According to the key informant, (interview with nursing superintendent), national policies and laws should be reviewed to retain new nurses; e.g. providing them in-service further education and create certain quota for their further education each year to assure them. Even though, it is not possible to retain them because they want to achieve everything within a short period of time. They do not want to wait for their turn.

Similarly, she explained that the teaching institute should be well equipped so that the students could learn better, focusing on those physical facilities to provide an excellent learning environment.

DISCUSSION

The participants of this study found that beginning a new job was really stressful to them. The findings correlated to past research findings with regards to the experiences and perceptions of new nursing staffs. They found that first experiences of professional nurses were often stressful which was referred to feelings of stress with relation to lack of experience, interactions with

physicians,^{8,9,10,11} lack of organizational skills, and having to learn new situations and procedures.⁸

Feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, fear of making errors at work, lack of competency and confidence, sudden loss of supervision from the instructors were the common sources of the stress found in this study. This has been echoed by another study¹² suggested that feelings of a lack of confidence, feelings of inadequacy, and the conflicting feelings of needing to be independent yet feeling dependent on others were common sources of stress for graduate nurses.

Almost all participants expressed that a supportive work environment contributed positively to their transition into the professional nurse role. A study reported that novice nurses receiving support from experienced nurses were found to be welcomed and provided a calming influence on the novice nurse.⁹ Another study focused on the importance of supporting and understanding the experience of new graduates in order to ease transition, promote job satisfaction and retain valuable human resources by the nurse leaders.³ This finding is not consistent with a finding in a study which reported that the participants’ emergence into the role of a registered nurse involved being introduced to cultural practices such as disparities in workloads and rosters. For instance, one participant noted: “Graduates aren’t much supported, we get the heavier areas, the last meal breaks and we get the long stints like ten days in a row”.⁷

The need for formal orientation program and professional development of the nurses has been suggested by all the three groups of study to ease the transition of new graduates. It was also focused in another study which reported that group of classes specifically designed to help with the identified issues such as lateral violence, communication, professionalism, reality shock, and prioritization of the new graduate nurse are essential to help them understand, process, and work through the issues they faced in the transition into the nursing work force.¹⁴

Similarly, the concepts of preceptorship, warm and welcoming attitude of the senior nurses and constructive feedback to the new nurses have also been suggested by this study. This finding is consistent with other literature which reflected significant impact of the preceptor on the developing competence, personal adjustment, and overall satisfaction of a graduate nurse. These studies

demonstrated that preceptors, through role modeling, are a strong influence in shaping graduate nurses' professional behavior.^{12,15}

CONCLUSION

Role transition is a key concept in the adaptation of newly graduated nurses to the staff nurse role. Beginning a new job is really stressful to them because feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, fear of making errors at work, not being prepared for the real work setting, lack of competency and confidence, were the common sources of the stress during the initial days. Accountability, increased responsibility and workload are also experienced during the role transition. The new graduates require formal orientation program, opportunities for professional development as well as the provision of preceptors during initial days, warm and welcoming attitude among the seniors and supportive environment to help them easing a role transition which facilitate in recruiting and retaining staff nurses at work. And this in turn ultimately results in enhanced patient care in the health care setting.

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