

NURSING EDUCATION IN FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Trends in health care suggest changes in nursing practice and implications for nursing education. Changing demographics, emphasis on health promotion, health care costs, movement toward community-based care, and expanding technology are factors that shape the health care system of the future and educational preparation of nurses. Faculties are faced with preparing students for future practice that will be more complex and specialized than it is now; will be provided in multiple settings; and will require extensive knowledge, critical thinking and other cognitive skills, technologic and psychomotor skills, and a value system for making ethical decisions. Outcomes of nursing education program include learning to learn, handling ambiguity, thinking like a professional, and accepting responsibility for decisions made in practice. For nursing to assume a central role in the health care system of tomorrow, reform in nursing education is needed today.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the health challenges facing the nation have shifted dramatically. In addition to shifts in the nation's demographics, there also have been shifts in nation's health care needs. Most health care today relates to chronic conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, cardiovascular disease, and mental health conditions. The ways in which nurses were educated during the 20th century are no longer adequate for dealing with the realities of health care in the 21st century.¹ As patient needs and care environments have become more complex, nurses need to attain requisite competencies to deliver high-quality care. To respond to these increasing demands, nurses need to achieve higher levels of education and suggests that they be educated in new ways that better prepare them to meet the needs of the population.

Nursing Education: Focus on future

The millennium has become the metaphor for the extraordinary challenges and opportunities available to the nursing profession and to those academic institutions responsible for preparing the next generation of nurses. Signal change is all around us, defining not only what we teach, but also how we teach our students. Transformations taking place in nursing and nursing education have been driven by major socioeconomic factors, as well as by developments in health care delivery and professional issues unique to nursing. Here are the challenges to watch, described in terms of their impact on nursing education.

Changing Demographics and Increasing Diversity

Greater life expectancy of individuals with chronic and acute conditions will challenge the health care system's ability to provide efficient and effective continuing care. Significant increases in the diversity of the population affect the nature and the prevalence of illness and disease. Nursing practice, education, and research must embrace and respond to these changing demographics, and nurses must focus on spiritual health, as well as the physical and psychosocial health of the population.² Student demographics are also changing. Students are entering schools of nursing with more sophisticated expectations for their education. Schools of nursing must be prepared to confront the challenges associated with today's more mature student body, and educational methods and policies, curriculum and case materials, clinical practice settings, and research priorities need to value and reflect the diversity of the student body, as well as the population in general.

The Technological Explosion

The rapid growth in information technology has already had a radical impact on health care delivery and the education of

nurses. Advances in processing capacity and speed, the development of interactive user interfaces, developments in image storage and transfer technology, changes in telecommunications technology, and the increased affordability of personal computers have contributed to the explosion of information technology applications. Advances in digital technology have increased the applications of telehealth and telemedicine, bringing together patient and provider without physical proximity. Dramatic improvements in the accessibility of clinical data across settings and time have improved both outcomes and care management. The electronic medical record will replace traditional documentation systems. Through the Internet, consumers will be increasingly armed with information previously available only to clinicians. Electronic commerce will become routine for transacting health care services and products. Nurses of the 21st century need to be skilled in the use of computer technology.

Globalization of the World's Economy and Society

Globalization has been brought about by many factors, including advances in information technology and communications, international travel and commerce, the growth of multinational corporations etc. With the "death of distance" in the spread of disease and the delivery of health care, there are both extraordinary risks and extraordinary benefits. Along with the potential for rapid disease transmission, there is potential for dramatic improvements in health due to knowledge transfer between cultures and health care systems.² Nursing science needs to address health care issues, such as emerging and reemerging infections, that result from globalization. Nursing education and research must become more internationally focused to disseminate information and benefit from the multicultural experience.

The Era of the Educated Consumer

Despite some information gaps, today's patient is a well-informed consumer who expects to participate in decisions affecting personal and family health care. With advances in information technology and quality measurement, previously unavailable information is now public information, and consumers are asked to play a more active role in health care decision making and management. The media and the internet have facilitated this trend. Technological advances in the treatment of disease have led to the need for ethical, informed decision making by patients and families. Consumers are thus becoming more interested and knowledgeable about health promotion as well as disease prevention. The increased power of the consumer in the patient-provider relationship creates a heightened demand for more sophisticated health education techniques and greater levels of participation by patients in clinical decisions.² Nurses must be prepared to understand this

changed relationship and be skilled in helping patients and families maximize opportunities to manage their health.

Demand for alternative and complementary health options.

At the low-tech end of the spectrum, the voracious demand by consumers for “alternative” or “complementary” therapies to enhance health and healing have begun to influence mainstream health care delivery. Palliative and End-of-Life Care Technological advancements in the treatment of illness and disease have created new modalities that extend life while challenging traditional ethical and societal values regarding death and dying.² New settings for care, such as inpatient and home-based hospice, and new forms of care, including pain management, spiritual practices, and support groups and bereavement counseling, are now likely to be part of well-developed health care systems. A significant gap in the body of scientific knowledge and clinical education with regard to palliative and end-of-life care remains, and nursing education must prepare graduates for a significant role in these areas.

Increasing Complexity of Patient Care

Patients in inpatient settings are increasingly more acutely ill; the standard ratio of critical care/specialty beds to general use beds in hospitals today is close to 1:1, up substantially from a decade ago. Furthermore, expanded life expectancy has led to increases in the number, severity, and duration of chronic conditions, thereby increasing the complexity of the care provided and managed by clinicians. The community has largely become the setting for chronic disease management and prevention. Providing services for defined groups “covered” by managed care will demand skills and knowledge in clinical epidemiology, biostatistics, behavioral science, and their application to specific populations. Nurses must demonstrate management skills at both the organizational and patient care levels.⁷ These concepts must be incorporated into the nursing curriculum.

Patient and public involvement in nursing education

“People who are living with the conditions are the experts”. The best health care is focused on the specific needs of service users and their carer's and families. They are becoming much more knowledgeable about their conditions, and what keeps them healthy. Many want to be more involved in care planning and decision-making. Good patient and public involvement in the development, delivery and review of nursing education is an important aspect of this. It is important to value the people who want to be involved and ensure that they are real partners in the process.⁴ Healthcare providers must actively promote and support patient and public

involvement in nursing education through their patient experience strategies, education strategies and board-level quality assurance processes.

Interprofessional Education

Interprofessional collaboration, a necessary component of effective care coordination in the increasingly complex healthcare environment, will not be broadly achieved until healthcare professional students are educated together. The poor communication and lack of respect between, for example, nurses and physicians, lead to poor outcomes; but effective teamwork and good working relationships can improve outcomes. Studies demonstrate that effective coordination and communication among health professionals can improve quality and patient safety.³ Sharing different professional perspectives is viewed as critical to this objective. This will only be achieved through interprofessional team training of nurse, physician, and other healthcare provider students, and this in turn requires committed partnerships across the professions. Nursing and medical students who are educated in interprofessional collaboration, knowledge of each other's professional roles and responsibilities, effective communication, conflict resolution, and shared decision-making, and who are exposed to the other students through simulation and Web-based training, will be more likely to engage in collaboration in future work settings. It is recommended that schools of nursing and other health professional schools should implement early and continuous interprofessional collaboration through joint classroom and clinical training opportunities.

Opportunities for Lifelong Learning

Nursing shortages have a negative impact on patient care and are costly to the health care industry. A significant nursing shortage exists today, particularly in acute and long-term care settings. It results from many factors. As the age of entering students rises, the number of years of practice decreases, also affecting supply. While the number of male and minority students has been steadily rising, their ranks are still underrepresented. The current shortage is judged to be deeper than past shortages and probably more resistant to short-term economic strategies that have worked before. These include the opportunity to practice in a variety of clinical settings; the dramatic increase in opportunities for nurses; new careers in care management and case management. Nursing education must partner with the health care industry to develop innovative short- and long-term solutions that address the nursing shortage. Accrediting bodies, schools of nursing, health care organizations, and continuing competency educators from multiple health professions should collaborate to ensure that nurses and nursing students and faculty continue

their education and engage in lifelong learning to gain the competencies needed to provide care for diverse populations across the lifespan.⁸ Faculty should partner with health care organizations to develop and prioritize competencies so curricula can be updated regularly to ensure that graduates at all levels are prepared to meet the current and future health needs of the population.

Significant Advances in Nursing Science and Research

Nursing research is an integral part of the scientific enterprise of improving the nation's health. The growing body of nursing research provides a scientific basis for patient care and should be regularly used by the nation's nurses.⁶ Most studies concern health behaviors, symptom management, and the improvement of patients' and families' experiences with illness, treatment, and disease prevention. Research is conducted to improve patient outcomes and promote the health and well-being of communities, especially of the most vulnerable populations. Nursing research and scholarship has received significant funding by public and private agencies in the last decade and is increasingly recognized as an independent body of knowledge.² However, the challenges associated with advancing the research agenda in nursing are complex and varied. Schools of nursing are not sufficiently focused on the scholarship and science of nursing as top priorities, and, although graduate degrees in nursing have become more common, doctorally prepared nursing professionals are not being produced in large enough numbers to meet the growing need. In addition, there is a need for enhanced mentorship for new researchers to strengthen skills and capacity to conduct meaningful nursing research. Significant opportunities exist for schools of nursing, especially those affiliated with academic health centers, to address these challenges and enhance the research contributions of nursing scholars.

Competency-Based Learning

Competencies are actually higher level skills that represent the ability to demonstrate mastery over care management and that provide a foundation for decision-making skills under a variety of clinical situations across all care settings. These competencies include leadership, health policy, system improvement, research and evidence-based practice, and teamwork and collaboration, as well as competency in specific content areas such as community and public health and geriatrics.⁵ Nurses also are being called upon to fill expanding roles and to master technological tools and information management systems while collaborating and coordinating care across teams of health professionals. The emphasis in nursing education must be optimal competency, especially in the specialized areas.

CONCLUSION

The nursing profession is one of the largest segments of the nation's health care workforce. Working on the front lines of patient care, nurses have a direct effect on patient care. Their regular, close proximity to patients and scientific understanding of care processes across the continuum of care give them a unique ability to effect wide-reaching changes in the health care system. Transforming the health care system to provide safe, quality, patient-centered, accessible, and affordable care will require a comprehensive rethinking of the roles of many health care professionals, nurses chief among them. Nurses must be prepared to meet diverse patients' needs; function as leaders; and advance science that benefits patients and the capacity of health professionals to deliver safe, quality patient-centered care. If new nurses are to succeed in this complex and evolving health care system, nursing education needs to be transformed.

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