

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Challenges of Community Health Nursing Education in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Comprehensive studies on community health nursing education have not been performed In Iran and nursing graduates have limited ability to provide health care outside the hospital. However, education policy makers require a thorough understanding of nursing education for training of professional nurses. The aim of the present study is to review the existing challenges of community health nursing education in undergraduate curriculum, and explore its dimension. In this review study, some medical resources including nursing index, nursing consult, Proquest, Scopus, Elsevier, Pub Med, SID, Iranmedex, Magiran and Medlib were used in order to cover all associated studies. Searching articles from 1991 to 2012 was performed by using key words: Undergraduate nursing education, community health, and review studies separately and in combination. Inadequate productivity weakness of holistic and community-oriented attitude of nursing students, non-applicability and poor training methods are the biggest problems in community health nursing education. Education of community health nursing is of poor quality and absence of educational models and appropriate practical programs challenge its progress against major barriers. The findings of this study have provided compelling evidences for authorities involved in nursing education. We believe that the desirable change would be possible by considering the experiences of students; teachers and employees involved in community health nursing, a process providing better understandings and directives for nursing education policy makers.

KEYWORDS: Baccalaureate nursing education; Community health; Review study; Iran

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INTRODUCTION

Nursing is excellent position to respond to numerous challenges facing the health system,

these challenges comprise epidemic of children obesity, migration, bioterrorism, unemployment, homelessness, violence, etc. Community health nurses play crucial role in different fields such as homes, schools, factories and health care institutions. To date, in countries such as Canada and United States, the majority of nurses work in hospitals, but it is estimated that by 2020 most of will be involved in the community. Therefore, the need for training competent and qualified community health nurses is felt more than ever. To achieve this goal, it is essential that nursing education curriculums be capable of training talented students to acquire efficient expertise in health services, and also have a positive influence on community health by using their knowledge.¹⁻

³To reach this aim, the priority must be given to obtaining proper knowledge about situation of community health nursing education, because competency of the health care workers is based on their education programs and curriculum. The efficiency of community health nursing education depends on the quality of students' clinical training programs.⁴ Nursing is a practice-based discipline and proper training has a major role in developing nursing skills.⁵

In Iran, in syllabus of Bachelor of science (BS) of nursing from a total 130 units, eleven units are devoted to community health nursing of which 7 and 4 units are assigned to theoretical and practical community health training courses respectively.⁶ In general, the goal of nursing education at BS level is to train nurses with potential to work as members of health team for providing healthcare services, education, research, consultation, and managing rehabilitation in relation to provision, maintenance and promotion of individuals, families and community health. Despite formulating comprehensive broad goals and designing community-based syllabus for nursing students, we could not achieve desired goals.⁷ Currently the curriculums of most nursing schools revolve around traditional nursing by which graduate nurses have little or limited capabilities of

providing care outside the hospital.⁸ An issue to be resolved is the current status of community health nursing education. What are the problems and challenges facing its implementation, and why nursing graduates do not gain necessary qualifications for practicing in this area? Determine the status of community health nursing education would be promising to various aspects of nursing profession. These beneficial include establishing characteristics of nursing curriculum and related factors in education, providing effective, high quality and community-based education, revising the curriculums and clarifying the function of nursing education centers, preparing qualified nurses for serving outside hospital, training of skilled and motivated workforce and finally improving the quality of nursing in healthcare system and promoting the efficiency of community health care services.

The intention of performing the present review originates from professional experience of the authors. Since 1998 the author has been involved in educating community health to nursing students. As there is no previously available review of such topic, the authors aimed to study the challenges facing community health in nursing education. This would hopefully provide nursing education policy makers with a comprehensive understanding of training community-based and professional nurses.

METHODS

In order to find published studies related to community health nursing education in Iran, we used available databases such as Nursing index, Nursing consult, Proquest, Scopus, Elsevier, PubMed, Google scholar and online Persian databases including SID, Magiran, Iranmedex and Medlib. Searching for English literature within 1970 to 2012 period and Persian articles from 1991 to 2012 was

performed by using single and in combination keywords of baccalaureate nursing education, community health, Iran, and review study. Documents reviewed included published reports in journals and those presented at the conferences. Retrieved information showed that few studies have specifically dealt with community health nursing in Iran. Among available studies, 11 articles included subjects about community health nursing education in Iran were included.

RESULTS

Of 11 investigations retrieved in the current study, and carried out from 2001 to 2012, seven were conducted in cities of Tabriz, Hamedan, Mahabad, Semnan, Tehran, Qom, Yazd and Isfahan, and 4 in Mashhad. The findings of these studies are described below:

Inadequate Productivity

In a qualitative study performed by Ildarabadi (2011) entitled “nursing students’ experiences from training and training in field in community health “, showed inadequate productivity as the main problem. The results of his study showed that misperceptions of nursing students about community health, lack of community health nurses in current healthcare system and other limitations were factors that probably account for consequences of inadequate productivity of training, that lead to lack of obtaining community-oriented attitude and inefficiency in providing care services outside the hospital.⁹ Heravi (2012) conducted a qualitative study on understanding of nursing students about community health training in field. In this study, students highlighted the current disproportionate positions of community health nurses. Also they mentioned the inhibitory factors affecting training and learning such as lack of expert instructors and proper management, inefficient communication between students and instructors, the absence of effective

evaluation system, inappropriate planning, lack of organized nursing processes and service-based programs. According to the experiences of nursing instructors, clinical training of nursing students does not lead to active learning and proper professional development of skills of the students.⁵

Baradaran studied new methods of field training and his finding showed that 72.2% of students who had attended a three days workshop prior to training, expressed that they had benefited from the training. This experience was not expressed by the students who did not attend the workshop and a significant difference was thus observed between two groups.¹⁰ In a descriptive cross-sectional study, Saberian (2002) studied views of graduate nurses and senior undergraduate nursing students who considered the health training as futile.¹¹

Weakness of Holistic and Community Oriented Attitude in Nursing Students

In a cross-sectional study, Dehghani (2003) studied the clinical training in field problems regarding students and instructors’ viewpoints at Shahid Sadoughi Nursing and Midwifery Faculty of Yazd. Most instructors and students (more than 50 percent) evaluated the efficiency of this approach as relative to completely weak for obtaining holistic and community-oriented attitude in nursing.¹² The Mahmoudi’s study (2008) evaluated views of nursing instructors and students in clinical training in field and showed that 66% of instructors evaluated the role of training in field in giving holistic and community-oriented attitude, relatively weak, and 53.3% of students appraised this issue as weak to moderately weak.¹³ Experiences of nursing instructors also indicated that clinical training of nursing students in field for community health is not appropriate to fulfill the needs of the community.⁵ But in a descriptive study, Zamanzadeh (2006) studied the domains of clinical training from viewpoint of instructors. These

included the characteristics of clinical education field including 5 parts of the features of compiled education program in the field, appropriate learning fields, method of education, method of evaluation, and other indices. The results showed that most cases of “good” score to program indicator was related to health department, also instructors of health department considered learning fields and assessment methods as appropriate.¹⁴

Non-Applicability

In Heravi's study, there was no compliance with presented content in class and training and lack of follow up of theoretical content in training period, complaining issues reflected in all students' feedbacks.⁵ In a descriptive analytical study, Salehi (2001) studied the difference between theoretical learning and clinical nursing services from perspectives of students, instructors and nursing staff. The results showed that coordination was partly existed between clinical services of community health and theoretical learning.¹⁵ Based on Saberian's study, students and graduates expressed that acquired knowledge was irrelevant to practice.¹¹ In descriptive analytical study, Borzou (2006) studied applicability of courses in clinical nursing from perspective of nurses. According to employed nurses, community health course ranked first and training and field training evaluated as least useful.¹⁶ Azar Barzin (2005) showed that average scores of application of community health nursing education decreased by increasing work experience of employed nurses. Also, the average score of application of community health was 18.79, where internal medicine and surgery with 34.86 was of highest and mothers and infants with 11.58 of lowest applicability.¹⁷

Training Methods

Ebadi indicated that nursing education programs are still focused on bedside teaching as traditional training method.

Although nursing schools in Iran attempted to adopt educational programs with community health approach and primary health care, nurses are still trained with traditional methods.¹⁸ Khorasani reported that current training and externship courses of student nurses are mostly devoted to filling the clients' health record and gathering health statistics and reports that are usually performed by primary health technicians or midwives. Therefore, there is no room for practice for nursing students including close contact with community resources and especially with families and sometimes it is even limited to repeating theoretical contents and superficial visits at home and community projects.⁷

DISCUSSION

This study examined the challenges of community health nursing education. To date, it is not possible to arrive at a general conclusion about its different aspects as there have been few specific studies on this issue. However, according to all available studies, inadequate productivity of students' training periods, weakness of holistic and community-oriented attitude in nursing students, non-applicability and poor training methods could be regarded as the main problems of community health nursing education. Students consider these training courses as opportunities for fun and leisure and the foregoing aspects deeply affected their attitude to learning process, thus students have no motive to actively participate in training. Also there are restrictions in the presence of male students in some units and primary health centers, and limited hours of training in these centers would further limit the motivation, which is eventually counter productive.¹⁹

Most of the students, considered the role of nurses just in hospital, which is contrary to the despite objectives of course plans in baccalaureate of nursing. In other words, nursing lessons emphasize on

community-oriented nursing. However, in practice the students and nursing personnel are medically-oriented, which is in conflict with the philosophy of field training courses. Saberian showed in his study that 20.51% of trainees believed that community health nursing is unrelated to nursing profession.¹¹ This view considered the content of their training as non-functional. Khorramirad reminded that one of the health training goals is education of community-based nursing and providing services to community, a reality which is now almost forgotten.²⁰

Another problem of community health nursing education is its non-applicability. This seems to reflect in employing most nurses in medical centers such as hospitals, without having any special position in health centers. In this context, also is the lack of proper perception of students about health courses. This leads them to consider community health as redundant and useless.

Nursing schools should improve their education methods meet the needs of community as it is essential for their graduates to fulfill the requirements of the health system. Nursing instructors have to apply students' center methods for education. Students become active by these methods and acquire skills in critical thinking, self learning, communication and team work.²¹

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show the poor quality of training in community health nursing. Lack of appropriate educational models and proper administrative planning has limited progress of community nursing due to these major obstacles. The findings of this study provided data for policy makers and authorities of nursing education. It is suggested that different aspects of community health nursing be studied more specifically, based on regional affairs. It seems that change and reform could be possible by

better understanding of community health nursing education by assessing experiences of students, instructors, managers and employees concerned, and gradually expand the position of nursing from hospitals to community.

Based on the results of this study, following strategies could promote the quality of community health nursing education:

- 1- Nursing schools should underline community-oriented nursing in theoretical and practical educations.
- 2- Nursing instructors engage their students in specific tasks in community health nursing training.
- 3- Nursing instructors and managers have to improve the mentality of nursing students about community health nursing.
- 4- Managers should employ competent instructors in student education.
- 5- Promoting the position of community health nursing in health care delivery system.
- 6- Appropriate evaluation and management in education.
- 7- Employing nurses in schools, industry, prisons, health centers etc.

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