

Undergraduate Nursing Students' Experiences of Their Clinical Practice

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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study was conducted to assess the nursing students' experiences of their clinical practice at one public university in Sarawak, Malaysia. Purposive sampling was used to recruit nine undergraduate nursing degree students at a medical faculty. An in-depth interview based on an open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data. The open-ended questionnaire was used to assess the students' expectation, feelings, challenging experiences related to work culture, knowledge and skills in patient care, teaching learning supports, people interpersonal relationship, students' role and their coping mechanism in clinical practice. Data were analysed using content analysis approach facilitated by Nvivo software (Version 8.) The themes emerged from the data analysis included (a) Gaining insight into the reality of clinical working environment and (b) challenges. The subthemes illustrated the students' challenges were interpersonal relationship with people at the work place, different ward environment, theory-practice gap and insufficient clinical practice, and anxiety. The participants also reported experiencing anxiety due to challenges; however, after a period of time, they learnt to cope with them. The students were able to use different coping mechanism such as internal and external motivation, and this increased their confidence as they progressed in their learning. The learning difficulties faced by nursing students during clinical placement show that a supportive learning environment is important. This study proposed practical strategies to empower students in clinical learning and increase their self-esteem and confidence. In order to improve quality of students' clinical education, adequate and effective work collaboration between nursing education and health care services are recommended. Future research should focus on how to create a supportive clinical learning environment in local setting.

Key words: *nursing students, clinical practice, supervision, theory-practice gap.*

INTRODUCTION

The education institutions and medical health service facilities have important collaborative roles in ensuring the quality of nursing students' learning. During clinical posting, nursing students learn from the nursing lecturers and clinical teachers as well as nurses working in the clinical settings. It is during this time that students attempt to develop patient care skills as well as apply theory learnt from the classroom into practice. The Malaysian Nursing Board requires the nursing students to achieve 90% of the clinical procedures before they can sit for licensure examination. However, the nursing students may have learning problems during clinical posting which may affect their acquisition of clinical competency.

Previous studies reported that nursing students faced challenging experiences during their clinical postings. These challenges arise when students are unfamiliar with the work environment and new to the equipment and people (Pulido-Martos, Augusto-Landa, & Lopez-Zafra, 2011). Studies have reported that students become stressful when they could not achieve their clinical learning objectives or perform well during clinical assessments and patient care practices (Higginson, 2006; Pulido-Martos et al., 2011). Other studies have also reported that