



The rise and fall of public hospitals-based nurse training

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Abstract

Aim/objective: To evaluate the effectiveness of university-based nurse education compared to vocational training in preparing nurses for the future healthcare landscape.

Background: The shift from apprenticeship-based nurse training to university-based education in the marked a significant change in the nursing profession. This transition also saw the abandonment of the two-tier structure of registered and enrolled nurses, leading to an all-graduate profession.

Results: While the move to university-based education aimed to enhance nursing education by integrating academic knowledge and technical skills, there are concerns regarding its impact on students and patient care. Students today face financial challenges, limited practice opportunities, and a potential loss of the sense of belonging that was prevalent in hospital-based training programs. Moreover, the academic environment may deter some individuals who cannot afford university fees or struggle to attain a degree. The specialization of courses may also contribute to workforce inflexibility.

Conclusions: The transition to university-based nurse education was a significant change, but its outcomes have raised questions about its effectiveness. This paper advocates for a reevaluation of the apprenticeship model, suggesting a hybrid approach that combines university input with generic training to better prepare nurses for the evolving healthcare needs.

Keywords: Nurse education; Vocational training; Apprenticeship model; Healthcare workforce

Introduction

Nursing is indeed a multifaceted profession that requires a blend of interpersonal skills, academic knowledge, and technical expertise. The transition to university-based nurse education since the 1990s has brought about significant changes, but there are concerns about its effectiveness in preparing nurses for their roles. (Bradshaw, 2001)

Despite the intentions to integrate academic theory and clinical teaching through university-based education and clinical placements, criticisms have emerged regarding the readiness of nursing recruits for the challenges of their profession. The shift from the apprenticeship model to a more academic approach has had implications for students' financial burdens, limited practice opportunities, and a potential loss of the sense of belonging that was prevalent in traditional hospital-based training. The move towards branch-specific courses has also led to concerns about the flexibility of the nursing workforce. Nurses are required to perform a wide range of tasks, from preventing pressure sores to consoling the bereaved and prescribing medications. This diversity of responsibilities necessitates a comprehensive and adaptable approach to nurse education. (Council of Deans & Universities , 2015)

While nursing education has evolved to emphasize evidence-based practice and academic credentials, there remains a societal perception challenge in recognizing nursing as a fully-fledged profession. This perception contrasts with fields like tourism and media studies, where university courses are widely accepted without controversy. (Cummings, 2016)

In light of these challenges and criticisms, there is a call for a reevaluation of nurse education. It's time to reconsider the balance between academic knowledge and practical skills, perhaps by revisiting elements of the apprenticeship model while incorporating the benefits of university input and generic training. This hybrid approach could better equip nurses for the complex and demanding nature of their profession, ensuring that they are prepared to deliver high-quality care in diverse healthcare settings. (Department for Education, 2021)

As former proponents of university-based nurse training, we have come to question whether the profession has struck the right balance. While the emphasis on academic standing has its merits, the drawbacks of the transition have become increasingly apparent.

Disconnection between Academia and Practice: Integrating a vocational subject like nursing into an academic setting has created challenges. It has strained the relationship between educators and healthcare providers, leading to a more contractual rather than collaborative dynamic. The removal of student number caps has increased competition for clinical placements, impacting the quality of practical training. (Glen, 2009)

Student Experience: Nursing students find themselves in a limbo between academia and practice, lacking the full integration and immersion in healthcare settings that the apprenticeship model provided. Clinical placements may be geographically distant from universities, affecting students' sense of belonging and practical learning experiences. (Hubble et al., 2017)

Loss of Professional Cohesion: Hospital-based nursing schools fostered a cohesive environment that nurtured professional development. Students were immersed in the healthcare culture from the beginning, benefiting from close interactions with patients and clinical experts. The shift to university settings has led to a loss of this professional collegiality and direct patient interaction. (National Audit Office, 1992)

Theory-Practice Gap: The separation of teaching and supervised practice has widened the theory-practice gap, leading to potential confusion and incongruity in learning outcomes. While simulated practice has its benefits, it may not fully substitute for authentic clinical experiences. (NHS Employers, 2019)

Academic Barriers: The move towards fully academic programs has raised concerns about excluding potential recruits who may struggle with degree-level education. The relevance of some academic aspects of nursing courses is also questioned in comparison to practical clinical skills. (The Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2018)

Fragmentation of Roles: The introduction of nursing associates and the removal of general nursing programs have created a more fragmented workforce with limited flexibility and understanding of diverse nursing roles. This fragmentation can pose challenges in adequately preparing nurses for various patient populations and healthcare needs. (Bradshaw, 2001)

Public Perception: Nursing has faced challenges in portraying the value of university-based education to society. Misconceptions persist about the balance between academic learning and practical training, contributing to a lack of understanding and appreciation for the complexities of nursing education and practice. (Council of Deans & Universities UK, 2015)

These challenges highlight the need for a comprehensive reevaluation of nurse education, considering the strengths of both traditional apprenticeship models and contemporary academic approaches to ensure that nurses are well-prepared to meet the demands of modern healthcare systems. (Cummings, 2016)

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