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The Preceptor's Role in Student Evaluation: An Investigation

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Abstract

The evaluation of nursing students' clinical learning in the preceptorship model of clinical teaching is a shared responsibility between the lecturer and the preceptor in the educational institution where this research took place. The purpose of the study is to explore the preceptor's role in student evaluation.

This thesis uses a comparative descriptive design to investigate the similarities and differences between lecturers' and preceptors' valuing of specific clinical evaluation criteria as set out in the clinical evaluation tool. The lecturers' and preceptors' perceptions of the clarity of the clinical evaluation tool are also explored using a qualitative approach.

A sample of ten lecturers and seventy preceptors who provide clinical teaching to second year undergraduate nursing students in acute care settings, was drawn to compare if the clinical evaluation criteria were valued differently between the groups. A questionnaire was developed using the clinical evaluation tool used by the educational institution. Data analysis demonstrated more similarities than differences between the criteria selected as most critically important by lecturers and preceptors. Differences were demonstrated on four criteria which were rated more highly by lecturers than preceptors. This suggested that preceptors' evaluations of students' clinical practice pertaining to those criteria would differ from lecturers' expectations of students' practice. A quasi-statistical content analysis of open-ended questions explored lecturers' and preceptors' perceptions of the clarity of the clinical evaluation tool.

The influence of preceptors' educational level on the valuing of specific criteria was also explored and was shown to have most influence on preceptors' valuing of cultural safety. Factors which might explain these findings are identified and discussed, namely socialisation of preceptors to work-based values; variability of exposure to the education environment for preceptors; difficulty defining clinical competence and preceptors' level of experience. The study endorses preceptors' involvement in clinical evaluation and highlights future directions for research and development of the preceptor role.

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Glossary

Clinical evaluation	Pertains to both the summative evaluation and the formative evaluation a student receives regarding their practice.
Evaluation	Is both a process and a product. As defined by Scriven (1991) the term refers to the process of systematically determining the merit, worth and value of something and also denotes the products of that process. Therefore both formative and summative evaluation are encompassed in this term.
Formative evaluation	Is the 'process' of evaluation or the ongoing feedback a student receives from both the preceptor and the lecturer to inform them of their progress.
Lecturer	Registered nurse who is employed by the educational institution and provides theoretical teaching in the classroom and facilitates clinical teaching collaboratively with the preceptor.
Nurse clinician	Registered nurse who is employed by a health care agency and whose primary employment is in clinical practice.
Nurse educator	Used generically to include all nurses who work in an educational role. This includes registered nurses who work in health care agencies and educational institutions and who may or may not have a clinical teaching role.
Nurse tutor	Registered nurse who is employed by an educational institution and provides both classroom teaching and clinical teaching in undergraduate diploma programmes.
Preceptor	Registered nurse whose primary employment is in the clinical area where nursing students are placed. Provides one-to-one clinical teaching for a student during their clinical placement.

Summative evaluation	Is the 'product' or end result of achievement the student receives from a lecturer at the completion of a clinical placement.