



DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND QUALITIES OF FUTURE NURSES DURING THEIR PRE-GRADUATION TRAINEESHIP

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ABSTRACT:

The choice of an occupation is an important step in everyone's life. The greatest risk that a wrong choice entails is for the person to be forced to do a job he/she does not enjoy. So careers advice is a vital prerequisite for a successful career. Experience shows that an effective career is directly dependent on the successful choice of an occupation. The performance of various tasks during the pre-graduation traineeship of future nurses will make them feel satisfied with the profession they have chosen and will act as a stimulus for them to practice the said profession.

Aim: This study aims to verify the formation and improvement of professional skills and qualities of the nurses-to-be during their pre-graduation traineeship.

Material and methods: We have surveyed the opinions of trainee nurses, students majoring in 'Nursing', as well as those of their mentors in the university hospitals and clinics.

Results and discussion: It is a positive fact that for the surveyed students, the most important is the moral qualities that correspond to the moral values in the nursing profession. The fact that the respondents' rate as most significant moral qualities, such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, responsiveness and empathy, can serve as grounds for positive forecasts concerning the future development of the students, provided their further development is organized correctly.

Conclusion: We have established that professional skills and qualities are developed and improved during the pre-graduation traineeship of the future nurses.

Keywords: professional skills, competencies and qualities, future nurses, pre-graduation traineeship,

INTRODUCTION:

The choice of an occupation is an important step in everyone's life. The greatest risk that a wrong choice entails is for the person to be forced to do a job he/she does not enjoy. Careers advice is designed to assist people effectively in their professional choice and the relevant professional training. It is vital in developing a positive personal attitude to work, in developing professional self-esteem and satisfaction with the job done. „According to Tornyova, the involvement of the future medical specialists in various tasks and activities during their training, the provision of high-quality healthcare provide an opportunity for the specialists to improve their moral self-consciousness, to develop moral feelings, to develop competencies and skills to demonstrate their moral values.“ [1] Through their profession, people realize their potentials in the community, through it, they create values for themselves and for society as a whole. The concordance between the requirements of one's professional activity and one's individual interests and attitudes determines to a great extent one's professional achievements. [2, 3] Career advice is a vital prerequisite for a successful career. Experience shows that an effective career is directly connected with the successfully chosen profession. The performance of various tasks during the pre-graduation traineeship of future nurses will make them feel satisfied with the profession they have chosen and will act as a stimulus for them to practice the said profession.

Various incentives are formed, changed and demonstrated in one's professional activity. The personal readiness to provide patients with high-quality healthcare is determined by the developed need for knowledge and skills in the specialty, the strive for self-fulfillment. According to some authors, for the provision of high-quality healthcare, it is important for all activities and tasks to be well planned, organized, conducted in accordance with the standard, and documented. This shows that the

training of students has to create an opportunity for them to enrich their knowledge needed for the provision of adequate and varied care. [4]

The constantly changing conditions and the increasing requirements to healthcare specialists call for the introduction of such methods and approaches in education and training that stimulate their cognitive activity and professional interests. [5] Professors and tutors play a crucial role and have a special contribution to students' professional development. They guide and motivate future nurses to make their successful professional choice. During their course of studies, students develop their professional self-awareness and strive to develop and demonstrate the mastered qualities and competencies. [6, 7]

In order for students to develop and strengthen their professional skills and qualities during their pre-graduation traineeship and clinical practice, the conduct and attitude of their mentors in the university hospitals and clinics, as participants in their practical training, are of primary importance. Students are strongly influenced by their mentors as role models, especially if the preconceptions and expectations of the students correspond to the conduct of the mentor. The combination of professional and psycho-social support that the trainee (the student) receives allows for the complete realization of his/her potentials. [8] The mentor helps students in the process of their adaptation to the new conditions required by the process of work in which they are involved and has a positive influence on students' motivation to make a successful career. [9]

The main focus in the professional requirements to nurses is on their ability to communicate, to master theoretical and clinical knowledge, and to put the acquired knowledge into practice, to be responsible and able to make independent decisions. [10]

The pre-graduation traineeship is the final stage of the practical training of students majoring in Nursing. Its main purpose is to contribute to the development and improvement of the professional competencies of future nurses and ensure their readiness to provide high-quality healthcare in all sectors of the healthcare system. Because of this, the optimal organization and expediency of the pre-graduation traineeship to a great extent determines the level of students' preparation as specialists able to meet the needs of the patient and to live up to the expectations of society.

According to Kilova et al., the quality of the health care of tomorrow is heavily dependent on the professional, moral and ethical training of students during their pre-graduation traineeship today. [11]

AIM:

This study aims to verify the formation and improvement of professional skills and qualities of the nurses-to-be during their pre-graduation traineeship.

MATERIAL AND METHODS:

We have surveyed the opinion of trainee nurses, students majoring in Nursing (4th-year students) at the

Medical University of Plovdiv, Faculty of Public Health; 'Trakia' University, Stara Zagora, Faculty of Medicine, and its branch in Haskovo; 'Prof. Dr Asen Zlatarov', Burgas; as well as the opinion of their mentors in 'St. Georhi' University Hospital, Plovdiv, MHAT – Haskovo; 'Dr. A. Dafovski' Multi-profile Hospital – Kardzhali; and University Hospital – Stara Zagora.

Statistical methods: the primary information is processed by means of the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 16.0, and the charts and graphs – by means of Microsoft office 2007. Applied statistical analysis: descriptive statistics with quantitatively measurable values (simple arithmetic mean value and standard error) for comparing average values in the event of normally distributed quantitative indicators – and criteria. An alternative analysis is used for processing qualitative parameters. Spearman's correlation analysis is used for assessing the strength of the dependence between the surveyed parameters; graphic analysis – for the purpose of illustrating processes and phenomena. The statistical significance level of the Zero hypothesis (\hat{I}_0) was assumed at $\hat{D} < 0,05$. The survey covered the period 2016-2017.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Regarding the attribute of "age", the analysis of the results shows that a higher proportion of the studied students are in the age groups of 20 to 25 years-81.6%, and over 29 years are 12%. The average age of the studied mentors was 41.88 ± 1.04 years and the average years of experience were 18.74 ± 1.15 . According to the job indicator: 1% are head nurses, 16% are senior nurses and 83% are nurses. The development of a system of values and the respective qualities is connected with the knowledge and competencies of the future nurses for self-assessment and for developing the ability to control and self-control their conduct. In this connection, this study was conducted for the purpose of establishing how students rate the qualities necessary for the nursing profession in order of importance to the students themselves. Each respondent was given a list of 12 qualities (with the highest relative weight according to the preliminary survey) of different spheres of activity, which characterize the image of the medical specialist. Each respondent was asked to determine the level of importance of each quality for the profession. A three-level rating system was used: 1 – low level of importance; 2 – medium level of importance; and 3 – high level of importance. It is of note that the greatest percentage of students rated as important and very important qualities such as honesty, sincerity, responsibility, sociability, poise, followed by qualities such as integrity, responsiveness and tolerance. The relatively small proportion of the surveyed students who rated eruditeness as very important could be explained by the fact that students realize the need for profound and varied knowledge in order to master the profession they have chosen, which invariably influences the process of mastering professional competence /Table 1/.

The rating of the qualities necessary for the nursing profession by the level of importance provided above can be explained by the fact that it is an expression of their striv-

Table 1. Qualities rated by level of importance for the nursing profession (in %)

Qualities	Low level	Medium level	High level
Honesty	—	33,40%	66,60%
Sincerity	—	42%	58%
Self-control	—	37,30%	62,70%
Integrity	—	39,50%	60,50%
Responsibility	—	31%	69%
Fairness	—	45,20%	54,80%
Responsiveness	—	46,30%	53,70%
Tolerance	—	43,60%	56,40%
Sociability	—	22, 5%	75,50%
Sensitivity	—	39,20%	60,80%
Poise (eventemper)	—	33,60%	66,40%
Eruditeness	—	68,40%	31,60%

ing to possess the said qualities to the highest degree. As a whole, the study shows that students have already developed to some extent the ability to assess themselves objectively, to observe themselves critically, and hence to correct their own conduct in accordance with their moral values and norms.

As regards skills that should be improved, by order of priority, during students' pre-graduation traineeship, the opinion of both mentors and trainees was surveyed. The majority of the surveyed students rate fairly highly the importance of those skills in forming the professional competencies of medical specialists. It was established, however, that tutors tend to underestimate most skills, with the exception of the skills to perform certain manipulations. The survey of the dependence by 'age' shows that mentors up to 30 years of age tend to believe that students need to improve their skills to provide general care and hygiene $P < 0,05$ ($\chi^2=9,1$) as well as the skills to provide specialist nursing care in accordance with the disease/condition $P < 0,05$ ($\chi^2=9,7$).

The necessary and demonstrated qualities and skills of trainees to fulfill their job duties and obligations successfully, according to the surveyed mentors, are presented as follows /Table 2/.

Table 2. Comparison between the necessary qualities and skills and those demonstrated by trainees in their work, in the opinion of their mentors:

Skills/Competences	Necessary	Demonstrated	U	P
	%±Sp	%±Sp		
Abilitytoworkin a team	93.2±2.4	72.7±4.3	4,16	<0.01
Ethicalconduct	90.9±2.8	77.3±4.1	2,74	<0,05
Initiative	58.0±4.8	38.6±4.7	2,89	<0.05
Abilitytocopewithcriticalsituations	94.8±2.5	79.5±3.9	3,3	<0.01
Discipline	96.6±1.8	83.0±3.6	3,38	<0.01
Loyalty	87.5±3.2	73.9±4.3	2,54	<0.05
Responsibility	97.4±1.5	87.5±3.2	2,78	<0.05
Organizationalskills	69.3±4.5	55.7±4.8	2,07	<0.05
Communicationskills	80.7±3.8	60.2±4.8	3,35	<0.01
Computerliteracy	54.5±4.8	30.7±4.5	3,62	<0.01

Statistically significant differences between the necessary qualities and skills, according to the tutors, and those demonstrated by the trainees were identified. The leading qualities and skills that a good nurse should possess are: responsibility in performing professional obligations - 97.4 ± 1.5 ; discipline - 96.6 ± 1.8 ; ability to work in a team - 93.2 ± 2.4 ; ability to cope with critical situations - 94.8 ± 2.5 , which, unfortunately, are not demonstrated to the desired degree in the work and conduct of the trainees.

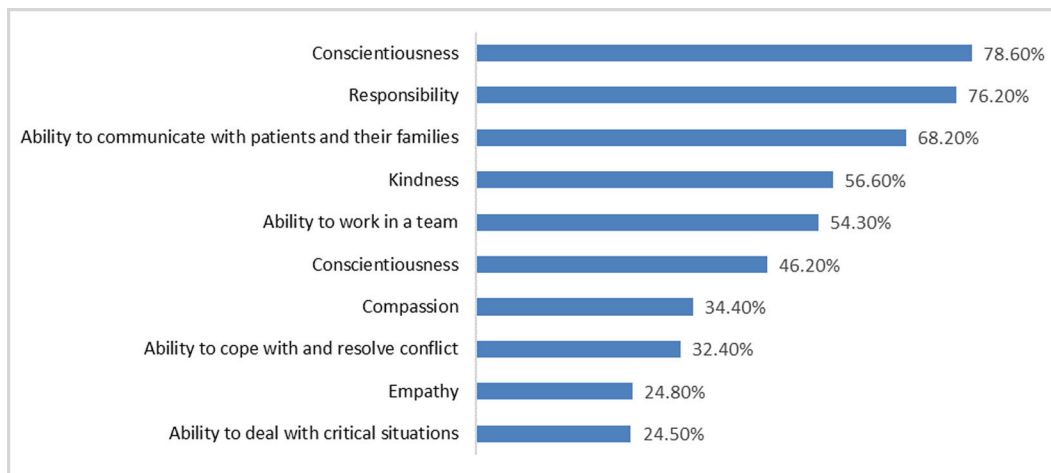
The obtained findings of the survey are consistent with those of previous surveys conducted by our authors, who establish that the most important skills and qualities that a nurse should have include a high level of accuracy, resourcefulness, concentration and self-control. A good nurse should be careful in her work, physically and men-

tally enduring, and abiding by the moral and ethical norms". [12]

It is a positive fact that to the surveyed student of greatest importance are the moral qualities that are consistent with the moral values in the medical profession. The high rating given to moral qualities, such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, responsiveness, provides grounds for positive forecasts regarding the future development of the students, on the condition that their further work is organized appropriately.

We were interested in surveying the opinion of the students of the skills and qualities that are further developed and improved during their pre-graduation traineeship /Fig. 1/.

Fig 1. Qualities and skills further developed and improved during the pre-graduation traineeship



The qualities with the highest rating were: responsibility -76,20% and observance -78,60%. These qualities really are of vital importance for the nurse, as the nurse spends more time with the patient and could detect and report changes in their status, and as for responsibility – even the slightest mistake could put the life of the patient at risk.

Patients need high-quality professional care and attention to their human suffering in their disease. Understanding and responsiveness to the complex emotional experiences, anxieties, doubts, and pessimistic expectations, support provided by the knowledgeable and competent in a difficult, sometimes crucial moment in the patient’s life. Therefore, it is necessary for nurses to acquire psychological competencies and knowledge, to broaden their psychological culture, to master the skill to express empathy. The empathic professional conduct facilitates the understanding and the recognition of symptoms of the patient’s condition and is an important prerequisite for achieving efficient therapeutic results and providing high-quality care.

Empathy is defined as the capacity to be emotionally compassionate, the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing emotionally from within their frame of reference. To be empathic means to be cordial, supportive, compassionate, and able to see the pain in the eyes of the other person. [13] It is incompre-

hensible that the quality of “empathy” is specified by only one-fourth of the surveyed students since one cannot be truly kind and compassionate if unable to place himself / herself/ in another’s position.

CONCLUSION:

In the course of our study, we endeavored to identify the development and improvement of the professional qualities of the future nurses during their pre-graduation traineeship, qualities which underlie the constant motivation of students and influence the optimization of the process of developing students’ professional competencies.

The results of the performed analysis will serve as a corrective when organizing and conducting the process of education and training in the future so that any negative trends could be identified and eliminated.

The conducted survey of trainee-nurses and tutors allows us to reach the following **conclusions**:

During their pre-graduation traineeship, which constitutes the final stage of the practical training of students majoring in ‘Nursing’, the following qualities and skills are further developed and improved:

- moral qualities which are consistent with the moral values in the medical profession;
- flexible skills, competencies and personal qualities that are of importance for the profession;
- further development of professional clinical thinking.

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Please cite this article as: Dragusheva S, Petleshkova P, Kasnakova P, Stoeva T. Development and improvement of professional skills and qualities of future nurses during their pre-graduation traineeship. *J of IMAB*. 2021 Oct-Dec;27(4):4025-4029. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5272/jimab.2021274.4025>

Received: 23/03/2021; Published online: 11/10/2021



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