Review

Establishing a gold standard for nurse educators in Nigeria

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The aim of this review is to explore the required experiences and expectations and provide understandings to establish a gold standard for registration of nurse educators in Nigeria. An integrative literature review was performed using Pub Med, the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Goggle search engine for publications from the years 2001 to 2012. A total of 52 journal articles and position papers were identified. After elimination of articles that provide little or no discussion, a total of eight articles were reviewed for this paper. In Nigerian, a dearth of published literature on nurse educator is available. A review of USA and Australia literature offers several papers that discuss nurse education. Eight studies met the inclusion criteria. The integrative review suggest that there are positive gains for nurse educators who undertake postgraduate nursing related to professional and personal growth which may lead to an increased ability to be able to leave up to their expectations and perform their roles. From the review it is obvious that the nurse graduates with PhD are most qualified and most suited to be registered as nurse educators. Conclusively, a nurse educator should be defined as a registered nurse (RN) who holds a graduate-level degree, such as a Master of Science or a doctoral degree in Nursing. At a minimum, nurse educators at colleges and universities should hold a master's in nursing and should have additional training in the science of teaching embedded in their curriculum.

Key words: Nursing, nurse education, doctoral education in nursing, nurse educator, nurse, gold standard.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian nursing education has experienced significant change in recent years and faces considerable challenges in continuing to provide world class healthcare services providers. Nurse educators play a pivotal role in strengthening the nursing workforce, serving as role models, and providing the leadership needed to implement evidence-based practice and improve patient outcomes (Bartels, 2005). According to Sayers et al. (2011), the nurse educator role is critical to the continuing professional development of the nursing and broader health workforce and influences the delivery of safe, quality patient care.

The preferred credential for teaching in the academic setting is the doctoral degree programs that prepare nurses to assume the full faculty role and open doors to leadership opportunities. However, nurse graduates with PhD degree in nursing are not recognized by the nursing and midwifery council of Nigeria as nurse educator and are denied registration. Instead Registered Nurse (RN) who holds a post basic diploma in nursing education are registered as nurse educators, and they are often seen as the gold standard for becoming a nurse educator in Nigeria.

Historically, nurse educators in Nigeria have played a critical role in the professional development of nurses and maintaining advancing nursing care services. Prior to the introduction of bachelor of nursing science degree programs, nurse tutors program (a post-basic one year training in education organised for nurses who holds Diploma in Nursing) was developed in response to a nurse educator shortage. Surprisingly this program continues to thrive today with the graduates being registered as nurse educators who assumed overall responsibility for student nurses as well as providing continuing and professional education for registered nurses.
The nurse educator role is critical to the continuing professional development of the nursing and broader health workforce and influences the delivery of safe, quality patient care (Sayers et al., 2011). Globally, nursing education and research capacity is relatively under-developed compared with other disciplines (Evans, 2007). Increasingly, professional associations, employers and governments introduce requirements for continuing professional education for nurses (Drennan, 2008). As the demand for greater academic status has increased, doctoral degrees have become increasingly more attractive to nurse educators, and, indeed, a new generation of nurse researchers worldwide. Unfortunately, at a time when doctoral degrees have become increasingly important to up-skilling a significant component of the nursing profession, there is no consensus, consolidating the professional identity of nurse graduates with PhD in Nigeria. Therefore it is timely to consider establishing a gold standard for nurse educators in Nigeria. This review sets out to explore the required experiences, expectations and perceived understandings of the nurse educator in practice from literature.

The questions guiding the review were: What knowledge, skills and experiences a nurse educator should have in Nigeria? What are the expectations and perceived understanding of the nurse educator in practice?

METHOD OF REVIEW

An integrative review method was selected as it provides a structured approach to the identification and interpretation of themes and differences in the literature. An integrative literature review is a method for assessing information based on a question or hypothesis that guides the review, interpretation and synthesis of findings (Weaver and Olson, 2006; Whittemore and Knaff, 2005). An integrative literature review is useful to gather and integrate information to inform Scholarly debate and suggest further areas for research. The CINAHL, Medline, PubMed, Science Direct data bases and the Google search engine were employed in the literature search of publications from 2001 to 2012. Search terms were: Nurse education (review, research, and application), Nurse educator (preparation, qualifications, registration, professional education and further education), Doctoral nursing education (competencies, recognition, and registration), Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria requires that references focus on nurse education, nurse educator and doctoral education in nursing and published in English between 2001 and 2011. References not meeting these criteria were excluded.

Findings

In Nigerian, a dearth of published literature on nurse educator is available. A review of USA and Australia literature offers several papers that discuss nurse education. A total of 52 journal articles and position papers were identified. These were reviewed and their reference list scanned for additional relevant literature. After elimination of articles that provide little or no discussion, a total of fourteen articles were reviewed for this paper. Each article was analysed by two reviewers using the research questions as a guide. Key themes were generated using the method of thematic analysis which draws together common issues and concerns. The literature is reported beneath headings corresponding to the questions that guided the review process and the emergent themes on establishing a gold standard for nurse educators in Nigeria.

Required knowledge, skills and experiences of nurse educator

Regardless of the setting in which the nurse educator is employed, there is a core of knowledge and skills that is essential if one is to be effective and achieve excellence
in the role. That core of knowledge and skills entails the ability to facilitate learning, advance the total development and professional socialization of the learner, design appropriate learning experiences, and evaluate learning outcomes.

The nurse educator role requires specialized preparation and every individual engaged in the academic enterprise must be prepared to implement that role successfully (National League for Nursing, 2002). There is specialized knowledge and preparation that is essential for practice as a nurse educator, and that knowledge and skill should be recognized and rewarded by the nursing and higher education communities. Competence as an educator can be established, recognized, and expanded through master's and/or doctoral education, post-master's certificate programs, continuing professional development, mentoring activities, and professional certification as a faculty member (National League for Nursing, 2002). Graduate education is preferred and in many cases required, to be a nurse educator. People interested in careers as nurse researchers or nurse educators usually must obtain doctoral degrees. At minimum, nurse educators at colleges and universities must hold a master's in nursing and should have additional training in the science of teaching (Bartels, 2005). The preferred credential for teaching in the academic setting is the doctoral degree (Bartels, 2005). The PhD has come to be seen as an essential research training to enable a graduate to become a researcher (Kirkman et al., 2007). It includes the notions of demonstrating competence as a researcher and providing the results of the study in a permanent format. Doctoral education in nursing leads to advanced academic degree awarded by universities that prepares the graduate for a research career or for advanced nursing practice (Williams et al., 2011). PhD in Nursing requires that the candidate carry out work which is independent, sustained, rigorous, original and at the cutting edge, in that it should add to the body of knowledge in nursing profession (Mitchell and Caroll, 2008). The PhD has come to be seen as an essential research training to enable a graduate nurse to become a researcher (Evans, 2007). Nurses at doctoral level are expected to make a significant contribution to the strengthening of practice, education and research. Doctoral programmes prepare nurses to assume the full faculty role and open doors to leadership opportunities and higher salaried positions.

"Doctorates are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

i.) The creation and interpretation of knew knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication.

ii.) A systematic acquisition and understanding on a substantial body of knowledge that is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice.

iii.) The general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems.

iv.) A detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry" (Kirkman et al., 2007).

Expectations and perceived understanding of the nurse educator in practice

A nurse educator is defined as a registered nurse who assesses, plans, implements and evaluates nursing education and professional development programs (Australian Nursing Federation, 2009). They are also responsible for advancing practice development and student support rather than having complete responsibility for nurse education as in academy (Conway and Elwin, 2007). Nurse educators work in schools of nursing as faculty members or in health care agencies as staff development and patient education specialists. Faculty in schools of nursing must have at least a master's degree and for baccalaureate and higher degree programs, the doctorate is preferred. Nurse Educators prepare students for their nursing career by designing, implementing and evaluating curricula; and combine their passion for teaching with their specialized nursing knowledge. They work in both the classroom and in the clinical setting, directly teaching the information and skills necessary for a successful nursing career (Nursing Degree Guide. http://nursingdegreeguide.com/specialty-profile/nurse-educators/ Accessed 15-05-2012). The nurse educators in practice apply didactics in theoretical as well as clinical nursing education using examples to illustrate the text.

Nurse educators are responsible for teaching and mentoring the next generation of nurses. Working within the classroom and in the practice setting, these nurses are responsible for preparing lesson plans, inspiring, instructing, and encouraging nursing students, and fostering in them an appreciation of the nursing profession. However, these responsibilities would require that nurse educators were provided with additional educational training and time to facilitate the learning needs of student nurses. They act as health educators in the community for clients, families and groups, and as staff development and patient educators in health care agencies such as hospitals, clinics, industry and schools. Nurse educators also enjoy opportunities to conduct research, publish articles in professional Journals, speak at nursing conferences, serve as consultants to education and health care institutions, write grant proposals, shape public policy, and participate in community service (Bartels, 2005).

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The literature review identified that nurse educators are often highly educated registered nurses who not only work in the health care field to treat patients but also teach and mentor nursing students so they can take on a career in nursing as well. These professionals work to ensure that students receive a high quality, comprehensive and well-rounded education in nursing. They educate students both in the classroom and in the field and help coach them through their first and often very intimidating clinical experiences. Like other academic professionals, nursing educators will participate in faculty requirements like managing the nursing department, getting grant money, developing curricula and even publishing their own work. Nurse educators are the key resource in preparing a nursing workforce that will provide quality care to meet the health care needs of our population. They practice in academic and clinical settings, and they must be competent clinicians.

However, while being a good clinician is essential, it is not sufficient for the educator role (National League for Nursing, 2002). The National League for Nursing asserts that the nurse educator role is essential to the ongoing development of the profession and the ability of the discipline to meet society's needs for quality nursing care. Nurse Educators not only have to have a degree in nursing but years of experience and higher education as well. Most nurse educators will spend several years working in the field to gain experience as a professional nurse before returning to school to become a nurse educator. Many state boards of nursing require the master's degree and nurses with a baccalaureate usually teach under the supervision of an experienced teacher with a master's or doctorate.

**DISCUSSION**

The integrative review examined and report on various scholars’ position concerning what knowledge, skills and experiences a nurse educator should have in Nigeria and the expectations and perceived understanding of the nurse educator in practice. The review reflects that nurse educators require better preparation to be able to leave up to their expectations and perform their roles. Role, identity, nurse educator education and career pathways, were identifiable themes throughout the literature reviewed. The minimum requirement for the registration of nurse educators in Nigeria should be raised to baccalaureate and higher degree programs. This will further equip nurse educators with the necessary knowledge and skills and enable them to build capacities needed to perform their roles and responsibilities as nurse educators. The definition of nurse educator should inform their preparation in terms of curriculum development and implementation and envisaged new models of practice evolving during the course of curriculum design and course delivery.

Nurse educators have a major role to play in the development of nursing, education and health research and are well placed to initiate or collaborate in research focussing on clinical practice and education. Engaging in collaborative clinical and academic research partnerships may further contribute to dynamic and innovative education and teaching practices actively supporting the intensive learning required by nurses to attain expert clinical skills and competency (Sayers et al., 2011). It may have to be accepted that there is no gold standard for becoming a nurse educator in Nigeria. Also, it should be noted that majority of nurse educators in Nigeria have no collective track record balancing the competing demands of educational requirements with their teaching role. The nurse educator's educational credibility is pivotal in developing student nurses. Therefore, it is essential that nurse educators in Nigeria engaged in standard academic programs to maintain their skills and provide a link between education and practice. Attaining high educational status and maintaining credibility as a scholar has not been set as an integral part of their role. The habit of attaining high educational status should develop without an external mandate from either the regulatory bodies such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria or from the employers.

One way to continue to try to add to the body of knowledge specific to nursing profession is to prepare nurse educators up to doctoral level. The literature review suggest that there are positive gains for nurse educators who undertake postgraduate nursing related to professional and personal growth which may lead to an increased ability to positively influence patient care, leading to improved care delivery or improved patient outcomes (Cotterill-Walker, 2012). The minimum requirement for the registration of nurse educators in Nigeria should be raise to baccalaureate and higher degree programs. This change is necessary with the emergence of a health workforce of increasingly divergent knowledge and skills. From the review it is obvious that the nurse graduate with PhD is most qualified and most suited to be registered as nurse educators. However, they could be made to write a letter of motivation stating their academic preparations, and attach copies of transcripts from various training institutions. This will assist the office of the registrar in decision-making as to whether they should be registered or not as a nurse educator.

The review provided evidences supporting nurse graduates with PhD as being most suited for registration as a nurse educator not only in Nigeria but elsewhere across the world. For the benefit of doubt, they should be made to write a letter of motivation stating their academic preparations, and attach copies of transcripts from various training institutions. This will assist the office of the registrar in decision-making as to whether they should be registered or not as nurse educator. Future research needs to be focused on specified outcomes and
the development measurable criteria for licensing and registration of nurses with doctoral degrees in Nigeria. It is important to reiterate that the literature review is not exhaustive, having been conducted by a single researcher with limited resources. Ambiguity associated with clear definitions of nurse educator’s educational levels, must also be considered a limitation.

Standard for nursing education and practice in Nigeria should define nurse educator. A nurse educator should be defined as a registered nurse (RN) who holds a graduate-level degree, such as a Master of Science or a doctoral degree in Nursing. At a minimum, nurse educators at colleges and universities should hold a master’s in nursing and should have additional training in the science of teaching embedded in their curriculum. The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria should ensure that these degrees are completed in areas that the nurse educator has familiarity working with in a clinical setting.

REFERENCES
