

Graduate transition scheme for baccalaureate nursing degree students: a pilot project

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Background

Nursing students experience increasing levels of stress throughout their baccalaureate programme ([Deary *et al.*, 2003](#)) and upon graduation face enormous challenges of settling into the clinical environment and managing clients with complex health problems. A graduate transition scheme (GTS) was designed to better prepare students graduating from a 4-year bachelor of nursing degree programme for their transition to Registered Nurses (RNs) and integration into the health care team to provide quality care to the clients.

Methods

quasi-experimental design was used for this pilot study to evaluate a GTS. Two groups of graduating students were randomly allocated to experimental and control groups. The students were existing groups of clinical practicum and the experimental and control groups were not created by random assignment of students. The experimental group of 15 graduating students worked in both rehabilitation and acute clinical settings for a period of 7 weeks (3 days a week) in their final year of study. During this 7-week practicum, each student assumed the duties of an RN and worked in teams with ward staff to deliver direct care to clients and families. Clinical teachers from the university were available for students' consultation. A control group of 15 students was arranged in similar clinical settings and these students were supervised by clinical teachers. After this 7-week practicum, students in each group were asked to complete a self-developed 30-item Student Evaluation Questionnaire to evaluate the extent to which the clinical placement arrangement had provided opportunities for them to achieve the following objectives using a 5-point Likert scale from 5 (very great extent) to 1 (very little extent):

- 1 Develop skills in providing quality care to the clients;
- 2 Assume the roles of an RN and integrate into the health care team to provide client care;
- 3 Make appropriate clinical decisions with regard to client care.

Ward staff were also asked to provide feedback on the students' clinical placement in their wards for the GTS group during this 7-week practicum. A 5-point scale (5 = very great extent to 1 = very little extent) was used to rate 20 statements, which evaluated staff's perceptions of the extent to which the clinical environment had been conducive to learning, providing benefits to client care and helping students integrate into the health care team. This was an unblinded study. Blinding to students was not possible in this study as the students know each other and the experimental group would discuss the intervention with students in the control group. Blinding to ward staff was also impossible as the researchers need to offer briefing to the ward staff in the experimental group settings about the GTS. With regard to the internal validity of the study, all students in the experimental and control groups completed the questionnaire. The clinical teachers and ward staff were given clear instruction and explanation of their roles and expectations prior to the study.

Findings

Students' evaluation

Overall, the students evaluated this GTS project positively. The majority of the items (87%) had a mean score of above 3. The items with a higher mean score and items with a rating of <3 are presented in Table 1. Comparison of individual items between the GTS and the control groups using MannWhitney

U-tests found significant differences ($P < 0.05$) in the following five items. (i) 'The objectives of this clinical placement were achieved,' (ii) 'Working with the health care team allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the clients' needs,' (iii) 'Ward staff gave a clear orientation to the clinical environment,' (iv) 'The clinical teachers assisted students to integrate into the nursing team,' and (v) 'This clinical placement offered a variety of client conditions to learn from.'

Ward staff feedback

A total of 75 nursing staff from both rehabilitation and acute settings in two hospitals completed the Ward Staff Questionnaire. The staff had been working with the graduating students in the GTS group for an average of two to four shifts. The staff included RNs (85%), nursing officers (6.8%), and ward managers (4.1%). The majority of items (90%) had a mean score of above 3 (see Table 1).

	Mean	SD
Student evaluation ($n = 15$)		
<i>Items with a higher rating</i>		
<i>Items related to benefits to client care</i>		
I participated in the health care team by delivering direct care to clients	4.00	0.53
I had developed good rapport with the clients	3.93	0.80
Communication and co-operation with the nursing team was enhanced	3.73	0.59
<i>Items related to practice orientation</i>		
Ward staff gave a clear orientation to the clinical environment	3.73	0.70
The clinical teachers assisted students to integrate into the nursing team	3.87	0.52
Direction for learning was clearly provided by clinical teachers	3.73	0.59
<i>Items related to integration and satisfaction</i>		
I had a sense of satisfaction throughout this clinical practice	3.80	0.56
This 7-week clinical practicum was useful in preparing me to work as a Registered Nurse	3.80	0.68
<i>Items with a rating of < 3</i>		
Opportunities to work with the multidisciplinary team to deliver holistic care to clients were provided	2.67	0.98
Opportunities to receive feedback from ward staff were provided	2.73	0.96
Communication and co-operation with the health care team from different disciplines was enhanced	2.80	0.94
Opportunities to develop competency in psychosocial assessment and interventions during this 7-week practicum were available	2.93	0.46
Ward staff feedback ($n = 75$)		
<i>Items with a higher mean score</i>		
<i>Items related to benefits to client care</i>		
The quality care provided by the students was beneficial to the clients	3.41	0.70
Students developed good rapport with the clients	3.45	0.76
Students actively participated in the health care team when delivering direct care to clients	3.48	0.70
<i>Items related to ward environment and student learning</i>		
The ward environment provided a supportive climate to facilitate the students' learning	3.45	0.72
This clinical placement was useful for the students' learning	3.57	0.77
This clinical practice provided good opportunities for the students to work with the nursing team	3.61	0.87
<i>Items with a rating of < 3</i>		
Students maintained good communication with the health care team from other disciplines	2.73	0.78
Students had opportunities to express their opinions in the ward	2.81	0.78

Table 1 Students and ward staff evaluation of the graduate transition scheme

Discussion

The GTS scheme was positively evaluated by both graduating students and ward staff in terms of its benefits in facilitating students' transition to RN roles, promoting students' learning in clinical areas and developing students' clinical competencies. Students commented that through integration into the health care team they were more able to work effectively with the members of the team in managing the care for a group of clients. Both students and ward staff agreed that this scheme had facilitated positive interdependent relationships and team working.

From the ward staff's point of view, they valued the opportunities of working in partnership with the final year students. The students in this project actively participated in the health care team when delivering direct care to clients. Staff also commented that the students were very well able to develop good rapport with clients and the care provided by the students was beneficial to the clients.

The findings have provided useful insight into the future development of the GTS for final year students. Since the students were not assigned randomly to the groups, there was a possible threat to internal validity. Nevertheless, the age, gender, academic performances of students in both groups were found to be similar. In conclusion the collaborative input from both clinical teachers and ward staff in this project was found to be successful in preparing graduating students for their transition to RN roles. More opportunities for the students to work and communicate with the multidisciplinary team will be arranged during the students' placement. More opportunities for the ward staff to offer feedback to the students will be arranged and students will be given more chances to express their opinions in the ward.

Reference

Deary I.J., Watson R. & Hogston R. (2003) A longitudinal cohort study of burnout and attrition in nursing students. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* **43**, 71–81.