

Nurses Interns' Perception On The Preceptors Role In Enhancing The Interns' Clinical Competence And Transition To Become Competent Staff Nurses In Health Care Settings In The Sultanate Of Oman

تصور الممرضين المبتدئين حول دور المرشدين في رفع كفاءتهم السريرية في مستشفيات سلطنة عمان
Khamis Al-Mamari, SN,BSN,MSN,Tutor Oman Nursing Institute, Ministry of Health

Yusra Al-Nasseri, SN, BSN, MSN,Tutor Oman Nursing Institute, Ministry of Health

Juma Al-Maskari, BSN,MSN,Tutor Oman Nursing Institute, Ministry of Health

Yusra444@hotmail.com

: الخلفية: تعتبر فترة التدريب العملي التي تتبع سنوات التخرج مباشرة كمرحلة انتقالية للممرضين الجدد التي تسهم في زيادة كفاءتهم العملية في المستشفيات. خلال هذه الفترة الانتقالية، فإنه ليس فقط يتم تعليم وصقل المهارات الفنية التي يجب إتقانها من قبل الممرضين المتدربين الجدد، ولكنها أيضا هي مرحلة تشتمل على نضج الممرضين الجدد لتحمل مسؤوليات عمل جديدة ويكونوا مرخصين لممارسه مهنة التمريض بكفاءة عالية (دوتشر 2001). وفقا لكونزمان و كروز (2001)، في خلال هذه المرحلة الانتقالية يكتسب الممرضين المتدربين الجدد القيم والأخلاقيات الخاصة بمهنة التمريض وكذلك يتعرفوا من خلالها على الأهداف الأساسية لمهنة التمريض والشعور بالهوية المهنية.

الأهداف: تقييم تصور الممرضين الخريجين الجدد لتأثير دور المرشد في تعزيز قدرتهم السريرية

الأساليب: تصميم كمي وصفي

العينه: 73 ممرضا متدربا مبتدأ تم اختيارهم من مستشفيات مختلفة. تم اختيار العينة بطريقه مستهدفه.

: كشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة ان المرشد يلعب دورا حيويا ومهما في زيادة كفاءة الممرضين الجدد لممارسه مهنة التمريض في المؤسسات الصحية. كما أوجد أيضا ان للمرشدين نفوذ ودور مهم من حيث تعزيز الأداء السريري ، والثقة والمسؤولية وتعزيز مهارات التمريض الايجابية في نفوس الممرضين الجدد. واقتُرحت الدراسة ، انه تكليف ممرض واحد للممرض المبتدأ أسفرت عنه نتائج أفضل من تعيين أكثر من مرشد. وفي الواقع، تم الحصول على مستوى عال من الرضا من قبل الممرضين المبتدئين الذين تم تعيينهم مع مرشد واحد أكثر من المجموعة الأخرى الذين تم تعيين لهم عدد من المرشدين

: يعتبر فترة التدريب فترة حرجية ومهمة بالنسبة للممرضين الجدد . لذلك التخطيط الجيد . لدعم برنامج التدريب العملي للممرضين الجدد وتعين مرشد واحد فقط خلال فترة التدريب يسهل عمليه انتقالهم ويعزز من أدائهم السريري. وقد بينت النتائج أن المرشدين يلعبون دورا هاما في غرس الثقة المتعلقة لتنمية مهارات وصنع القرارات في مهنة التمريض. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، استمرارية مرشد واحد لكل ممرض مبتدأ يبني علاقة قوية بينهما والتي قد أدت في النهاية للحصول على مستوى عال من الرضا من قبل الممرضين المبتدئين. .

التوصيات: توصى الدراسة بأهمية تعيين مرشد واحد فقط لكل ممرض متدرب ويتبعه في جميع الأوقات . علاوة على ذلك، ينبغي تنظيم وإعداد برنامج توجيهي شامل متكامل للممرضين الجدد والمرشدين.

Abstract

Background: The internship period is considered the mechanism that facilitates easy transition into the role of beginning-level staff nurse in an acute-care setting. During this transitional period, it is not only the learning and refinement of technical skills that interns must master, but also includes maturation into the role of being a professionally licensed individual and the inherent responsibilities that accompany licensure (Duchsher, 2001). According to Beecroft, Kunzman, and Krozek (2001). It is through the transition process that the interns acquire the value, attitudes, and goals fundamental to the nursing profession and a sense of occupational identity.

Objectives: To assess the perception of new nursing graduates regarding the preceptor's influence in enhancing their clinical performance, competence and facilitate graduates' transition.

Methods: A descriptive quantitative design

Sample: 73 nurses' interns selected from different hospitals. Purposive sampling method was used.

Results: The findings of this study revealed that, the graduates' perceived that, the preceptors do play a vital role in facilitating the graduates' transition in the clinical settings. They also agreed that, the preceptors have a great influence among the graduates' in terms of enhancing their clinical performance, confidence, responsibility, accountability and foster in them positive skills to be competent nurses in their field of practice. The findings also suggested that, assigning one preceptor yielded better outcomes than assigning multiple preceptors. In fact, high

level of satisfaction was obtained from the graduates with one preceptor more than the other group who were assigned multiple ones.

Conclusion: The internship period is considered a critical period for the new graduates. Having well planned program to support the graduates as well as assigning one preceptor to them facilitates their transition and enhances their clinical performance. The results illustrated that, the preceptors play a significant role to instill confidence related to skill development and nursing decision making. In addition to that, preceptor's continuity with one graduate builds up a strong relationship between them which resulted towards the end in high level of satisfaction among the graduates.

Recommendation: It is recommended to assign one preceptor only to the intern and shadow the preceptor in all shifts. Furthermore, a Comprehensive orientation program should be organized for the graduates and preceptors as well as a preceptorship programs in order to prepare all preceptors for their roles.

Keywords: Internship period, transition, interns, internship program

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare settings have become a complex environment due to the advancement in the technology. This has led to strengthening the education programs for the nursing students and to set up a comprehensive program after their graduation in order to be able to work in an ever changing environment (Smith 2005). The transition from nursing students to staff nurses requires tremendous efforts. It has been suggested in the literature that, a successful internship period will facilitate the transition and may yield a fruitful outcome in terms of enhancing graduates' competency (Burns et.al. 2006).

An internship is a work-related learning experience for individuals who wish to develop hands on work experience to various fields of specialty. This is when an experienced staff nurse (preceptor) progressively leads an intern to a mature, competent and independent professional. The preceptors who are assigned to the graduates play a vital role in preparing them during the internship period to work independently, enthusiastically and help them to be competent nurses (Ardion 2006).

Some studies have proven that the duration of the internship largely depends on the way the intern was trained (Cantrell et al. 2005). If the autonomy was inculcated from the onset, the intern will relatively experience a smooth transition and vice versa. Therefore, assessing the role of the preceptors during the internship period is one way to ensure effective transition of the graduates. This in turn, will reflect the extent role the preceptors do play in order to prepare the graduates to be competent nurses.

The internship period is considered the mechanism that facilitates easy transition into the role of beginning-level staff nurse in an acute-care setting. During this transitional period, it is not only the learning and refinement of technical skills that interns must master, but also includes maturation into the role of being a professionally licensed individual and the inherent responsibilities that accompany licensure (Duchsher, 2001). According to Beecroft, Kunzman, and Krozek (2001). It is through the transition process that the interns acquire the value, attitudes, and goals fundamental to the nursing profession and a sense of occupational identity.

Most of the literature highlighted that, the transition process is challenging and a source of significant stress among graduate nurses (Cantrell & Browne, 2005). In the qualitative study of Starr (2006), the new nursing graduates stated that, they had confusion and frustration during the transition period. In his study, he interviewed the participants and found that, designing a proper orientation program resulted in high level of satisfaction among the graduates.

The same result was obtained by Nehls et. al (1997). In this qualitative study, the participants highlighted that, the formal orientation program which was designed for them helped

them to become oriented to professional work environment, increased socializations, and professionalism and led to high job satisfaction. This study also shed the light in to the important role that preceptors do play. It is highlighted that, the growth of the nursing graduates was evident when the preceptors know their role and what expectation is anticipated from them (Nehls et al. 1997). It is furthermore suggested that, one to one ratio of preceptor to graduate led the graduates to find the job rewarding as well as experienced self confidence and competence in the nursing role.

Nash et al. (2009) supported the above-mentioned studies through using the same design. In his study, he found that preceptors play a key role in enhancing the clinical performance.⁹ Although locating and maintain adequate number of preceptors was a challenge, obtaining experienced nurses to act as preceptors is an important factor for the succession of any internship program. This study (Nash et al. 2009) stressed on the importance of preparing the preceptors and supporting them to clarify their role through designing them a preceptorship program. This will help the preceptors to act as role model, provide good practice to the students and clearly understand their role.

In addition, Craven and Broyles (1996) conducted a quantitative, comparative study to pilot a new internship program which is different than the old program the hospital used to run. In this comparative study, he designed a new internship program which had clear objectives, mission, and defined the role of the preceptors. Also, there was a regular follow up to preceptors and graduates for any difficulties during the internship program. The results of the this study revealed that, the new well designed orientation program yielded better outcome than the old one in terms of increase graduates' autonomy, confidence, safe and competent patient care. It led also to decrease the number of burnout among the graduates which was the major problem in the previous system. That was due to increase frustration, role confusion, lack of preceptors' support and dissatisfaction among the graduates.

Justification for the study

Reviewing the literature has suggested that, successful internship period is very essential to easily facilitate the transition of students to be competent nurses through the help of the experienced preceptors. In Oman, Locally; the Internship Program is used to facilitate the interns' learning experience, to ease a smooth transition process from graduate nurse to staff nurse's role, and to certify a successful completion of the internship requirements. It is a 6-month program that exposes the new graduate to three to four different clinical settings within the hospital with the focus on medical-surgical nursing experience. The intern is provided with an opportunity to learn new concept of continuity of care and to be responsible for patient care during the three traditional hospital shifts. The intern participates in patient care which emphasizes integration of prior learning with the demands of daily patient care. Orientation to the goals, policies, procedures, and administration of the hospital continues throughout the period of the program (Internship Program Manual).

From the foregone background; dissatisfaction has been noticed among many graduates during the internship period regarding the effective role of the preceptors. Due to the shortage of senior nurses in many of the health care settings in Oman, the nurse graduates usually are assigned to multiple preceptors whose years of experience are varied. This fact created a gap in the process of graduates' learning during the internship period which consequently led to increase anxiety and stress among them and therefore; graduates competency was not up to the expected level.

Also, In one of the local surveys that has been done in one of the institutes in Oman regarding the graduates' needs from the preceptorship program, it has been clearly suggested that nurse graduates still need a strong support from the preceptors to arrive at this level of maturity. However, a lack of focus on the interns' perceptions of preceptor continuity is a noted gap in the current internship program. Therefore, conducting this study will aid in understanding the role of the preceptors towards the graduates through assessing their perception about the preceptors' role in enhancing their clinical competence and facilitation of their transition during the internship period.

OBJECTIVES

This descriptive study was designed to assess the perception of new nursing graduates regarding the preceptor's influence in enhancing their clinical performance, competence and facilitate graduates' transition.

This study is addressing three questions and seeks to find an answer for. These are:

- 1) What is the perception of the graduates regarding the role of the preceptors in influencing the graduates' level of competency?
- 2) What is the impact of the preceptors in enhancing the clinical performance of the graduates and facilitate their transition?
- 3) What is the level of satisfaction of the new graduates about the internship program and about assigning them multiple preceptors?

This study has no hypothesis and therefore; it will be guided by the above questions.

METHODS

A descriptive quantitative design Study was utilized to conduct this study. This design is deemed appropriate because it will aid in answering the research questions from large number of participants by assessing their perception. The data will be collected using a questionnaire, which was adopted from the study of Smith & Chalker (2005). The tool was reviewed for content validity by experts. Pilot study was done to refine the tool and modified afterwards. The graduates participated in pilot study were three and were excluded from the study thereafter.

The questionnaire has five sections. The five point-likert scale was used to indicate the level of agreements with the questionnaire items. It was aggregated to three points: strongly agree and agree as agree, strongly disagree and disagree as disagree, neutral to show the significance of the result since the sample of the study was small. The questionnaire addressed the following areas: demographic data, clinical competence, role transition, satisfaction with the internship program, and interns' self assessment.

Target Population and Sampling Technique

The population for this study was selected from four health institutions in Oman which are: Royal Hospital, Khoula Hospital, Ibn Sina Hospital, and Boucher Renal Dialysis Center. The participants of this study are a cohort of new nursing graduates who graduated from Muscat Nursing Institute. The total numbers of the graduates were 80. Seven of them transferred to the regional hospitals; therefore, they were excluded from the study. Therefore, the total numbers of graduates who participated in this study is 73. Purposive sampling technique was selected.

Ethical Considerations

A letter of approval was secured from the dean of Muscat Nursing Institute and from the head of the four hospitals to conduct this study. The participants were asked to sign in an

informed consent as an approval for their participation. The researchers explained to the participants that their willingness to participate in the study is optional and they can withdraw from the study at any time. Also, it was explained to the research subjects that anonymity and confidentiality will be guaranteed and no names on the questionnaires will be written.

RESULTS

The questionnaire feedback was 100%. All participants returned back the questionnaires. Therefore, 73 questionnaires were included in the analysis. Analysis was performed using a computer based program (SPSS).

The questionnaire was divided into two groups. The first group was the graduates who had one preceptor during each rotation and second group was the graduates who had more than one preceptor during each clinical rotation. Based on these groups, the analysis of the questionnaires and comparison of the results were completed.

Demographic data

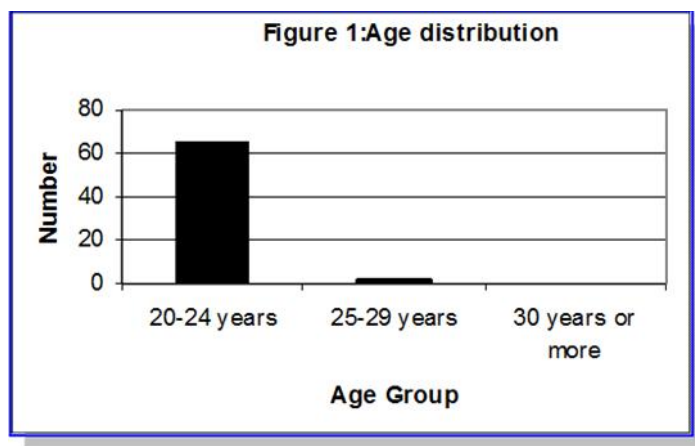


Figure 1: Age distribution of the participants.

Most of the new graduates were between 20-24 years (Fig. 1). The majority was female (99%), single (48%), married (43%), (13%) were not married.

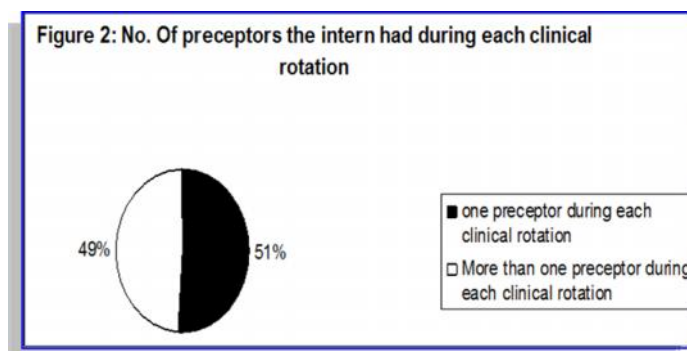


Figure 2: No of preceptors the intern had during each clinical rotation

Around 51% of the interns had one preceptor during each clinical rotation and the remaining graduates (49%) had more than one preceptor in each clinical rotation. (Fig. 2)

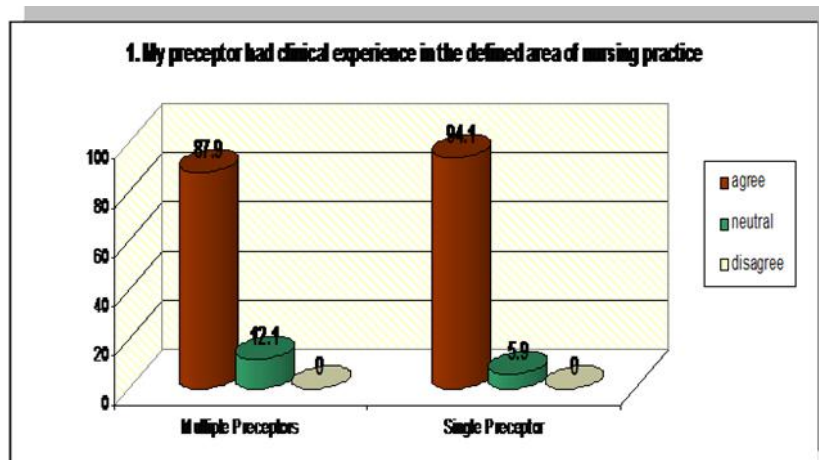


Figure 3: preceptors had clinical experience in the defined area of nursing practice

Almost all graduates either who had one preceptor or more agreed that their preceptors had clinical experience in the defined area of nursing practice (Fig. 3), recognized their roles and acted as role models (84%). Around 80% of graduates who had one preceptor agreed that their preceptors were interested in teaching them in clinical areas. However, only 58% of interns who had multiple preceptors agreed that their preceptors were interested in clinical teaching. In addition, 83% of the graduates with one preceptor did agree that they received constructive feedback from their preceptors whereas; only 58% of the graduates who were assigned to multiple preceptors stated that they received feedback from some preceptors assigned to them.

Furthermore, 70% of group 1 agreed that they received emotional support from their preceptors but 36% of group 2 who had multiple preceptor did agree that they received emotional support from their preceptors (see figure 4). In addition to that, 85% of the interns who were assigned to single preceptor, highlighted that, their preceptors nurtured in them the sense of responsibility and accountability which strengthen the interns graduate maturity and independence. However, 57% only of the interns who were assigned to multiple preceptors agreed that their preceptors did nurture them with the responsibility and the accountability role (see figure 4).

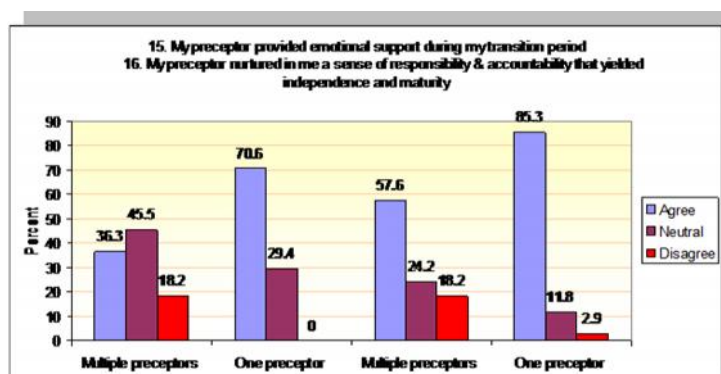


Figure 4: preceptors provided emotional support during the period of transition

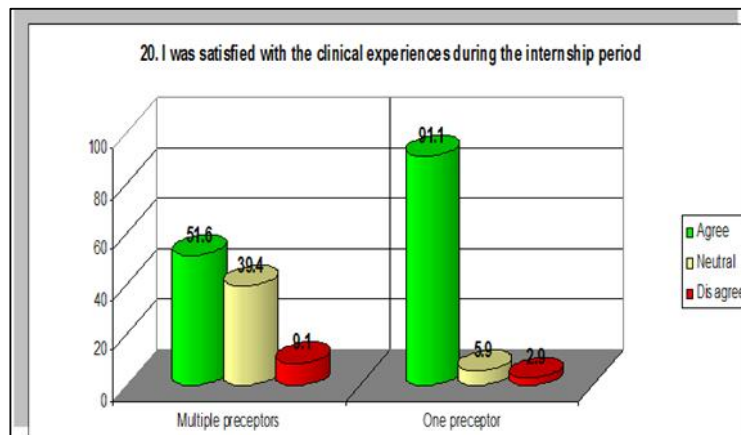


Figure 5: students' satisfaction during the internship period

Regarding the level of satisfaction among the graduates about the internship program, most of group one graduates who were assigned to one preceptor were highly satisfied with the clinical experiences during the internship period and about the internship program in general (91%). In contrast only 51% of group two graduates were not satisfied about the overall internship program. They were mainly dissatisfied about assigning them to multiple preceptors in each clinical rotation. (Fig. 5).

DISCUSSION

It is evident from the results of this study that, during the internship period, assigning one preceptor to the graduates yielded better outcome than assigning them to multiple preceptors. The finding of this study is similar to Smith, & Chalker, (2005) study. This descriptive study was designed to examine the new graduate's perception of preceptors' continuity. The result of this study revealed that, the graduates who had one preceptor in each clinical rotation had high sense of confidence, built sense of trust/bond relationship, and received regular constructive feedback because of the preceptors' consistency and continuity with same graduate.

Also, majority of group one graduates stated that, the preceptors provided emotional support and nurtured them with the sense of responsibility and accountability that in turn, led to increase level of graduates' independence and maturity. This fact has been discussed widely in the literature. In addition, assigning the graduates to multiple preceptors' found to increase anxiety and stress among them. This is because of lack of preceptors' continuity which affects the stability of the graduates and interrupts the process of learning. However, assigning one preceptor enhances positive relationship which in turn, leads to increase the emotional support, care and foster independence.

This study was designed to assess the nursing graduates' perception about the preceptors' role in enhancing graduates' performance and facilitate their transition. The findings of this study revealed that, the graduates' perceived that, the preceptors do play a vital role in facilitating the graduates' transition in the clinical settings. They also agreed that, the preceptors have a great influence among the graduates' in terms of enhancing their clinical performance, confidence, responsibility, accountability and foster in them positive skills to be competent nurses in their

field of practice. The findings also suggested that, assigning one preceptor yielded better outcomes than assigning multiple preceptors. In fact, high level of satisfaction was obtained from the graduates with one preceptor more than the other group who were assigned multiple ones.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- Small sample size, which affects the generalize ability of the results.
- A quantitative design was selected; however, non-probability sampling technique was chosen. Therefore, replication of the study is recommended to select the sample from all regional hospitals in Oman through randomization.
- The study looked at the graduates' point of view only.

CONCLUSION

The internship period is considered a critical period for the new graduates. Having well planned program to support the graduates as well as assigning one preceptor to them facilitates their transition and enhances their clinical performance. The results illustrated that, the preceptors play a significant role to instill confidence related to skill development and nursing decision making. In addition to that, preceptor's continuity with one graduate builds up a strong relationship between them, which resulted towards the end in high level of satisfaction among the graduates.

RECOMMENDATION:

The following recommendations are suggested for improving internship program in the future:

- One to one ratio of intern and preceptor during internship program.
- The intern should shadow the preceptor in all shifts.
- Comprehensive orientation program should be organized for the graduates and preceptors.
- A preceptorship program must be conducted for all preceptors to prepare them for their role.
- Replicate this study using a larger sample including regional hospitals.
- In addition, conduct a second phase study to explore the preceptors' views during the internship period.

IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

Conducting this study will lead to enhance the internship and preceptorship program in Oman which consequently will promote the quality of training the graduates will have. This in turn, will facilitate the graduates' transition and help them to improve their clinical performance as well.

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