



An Inquiry into the Undergraduate Nursing Student's Development of Clinical Judgment

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Background

Nurse educators' primary goal is that new graduates enter the workforce with the knowledge, skills and attitudes of an advanced beginner. At this career entry point, most recent graduates have not yet attained the requisite knowledge and preparation for providing safe nursing care in the context of complex patient situations.

Clinical judgment is the most important cognitive skill nurses need in providing care for complex patients. Better understanding of the processes involved in the development of clinical judgment as an integral component of expert nursing practice is foundational to the implementation of effective teaching/learning approaches.

Purpose

The aims of this project were to:

- Examine the conceptualizations and practices of *clinical judgment* within the context of undergraduate nursing education.
- Identify gaps in the current nursing education literature related to teaching learning/strategies to foster *clinical judgment*.
- Propose directions for future research to develop strategies that enhance students' development of *clinical judgment*.

Methods

This multi-method exploratory project consisted of:

- An in-depth review of the literature on strategies to enhance clinical judgment in nursing education.
 - The search terms included clinical judgment, concept mapping, high fidelity simulation and guided reflection.
 - Forty-four articles and dissertations published between 2007 and 2015 were reviewed.
- In-person interviews with five nurse educators with diverse levels of teaching experience.
 - Open-ended interview guide designed to elicit nurse educators' perspectives and experiences on nursing students' development of clinical judgment.
 - Interviews were transcribed then read multiple times for immersion then open coded.

Results

- Strategies to enhance critical thinking identified in the current nursing education literature included concept mapping, high fidelity simulation and guided reflection.
- There is little research on the impact and effectiveness of specific teaching methods on actual application of clinical judgment skills in both the clinical learning and practice environments.
- Faculty identified both personal interventions (i.e., modeling and student support), and specific teaching strategies (i.e., concept mapping, guided reflection and simulation) for enhancing students' critical thinking.
- The strategies and attitudes valued by faculty aligned with Tanner's (2006) clinical judgment model. Anticipation, which is not included in Tanner's model, was identified by four of five participants as a critical factor in clinical judgment.

Conclusions

The effectiveness of educational strategies in enhancing students' clinical judgment is an area that warrants further investigation. Questions for future research include:

1. How do clinical judgment skills change as students transition into practice?
2. How do students transfer clinical judgment skills developed and practiced within a simulation environment to clinical settings?
3. How do expert nurses describe their own trajectories in developing clinical judgement?
4. What are best practices for faculty to encourage reflection as a lifelong habit?
5. How does the concept of anticipation intersect with existing theories of clinical judgment?



Reference

Tanner, C. A. (2006). Thinking like a nurse: a research-based model of clinical judgment in nursing. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 45(6), 204-211.