

Professional Nurses' Perception of Compulsory Continuing Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The objectives of the study were to determine professional nurses' employment information and history, their nursing education, additional formal and informal education, and their awareness and perception of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for nurses.

Method: This study followed a mixed-methods approach, using a survey to collect qualitative and quantitative data to determine the views of professional nurses in South Africa regarding CPD and post-graduate education. Quantitative data was descriptively analysed in Microsoft Excel, qualitative data was analysed thematically.

Results: One-hundred and twenty-nine responses (129) were received out of the eight-hundred and fifty-five (855) invitations sent. Most of the respondents were female (83.72%) and 50 to 59 years old (35.66%). 87% of respondents were aware of the concept of CPD and 77% thought that it should be compulsory for nurses. Only 51% of respondents were aware of the new South African Nursing Council's (SANC) regulations regarding compulsory CPD for nurses. Respondents exhibited an overall positive perception of CPD, agreeing that it should be a continuous process in order to improve the quality of care they provide, enhance their knowledge and skills, and remain up to date with the latest developments in the field. Approximately half of the respondents felt that CPD should be the joint responsibility of the employer and the employee (the nurse). The biggest self-reported barrier to obtaining CPD points was time and cost.

Conclusion: The results of this study show that professional nurses in South Africa have an overall positive perception of CPD. It is recommended that the SANC should ensure that nursing professionals are aware of new regulations and should play a supportive role in ensuring that there are sufficient opportunities for nurses to obtain CPD points. Employers should also create conditions conducive to professional development, encourage nurses and facilitate opportunities to obtain CPD points.

Keywords

Nurse, Professional Development, Post-graduate education.

Abbreviations

APC: Annual Practising Certificate; ARC: African health Professions Regulatory Collaboration; CPD: Continues Professional Development; HASA: Hospital Association of South Africa; SANC: South African Nursing Council.

Introduction

What was adequate preparation for nursing years ago is insufficient

for nursing needs today. Nurses are faced with an increasing demand to remain professionally up-to-date and capable of coping with changes in nursing, cultural differences, disease changes and the stresses of nursing [1-3].

Additional burdens have been placed on nurses due to: improvements in technology, the impact of HIV/AIDS on health services, trauma due to crime and road accidents, the increase in degenerative diseases, the restructuring and reorganisation of delivery of health care and increased public scrutiny and demands for professional accountability [1,3-5].

The purpose of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is to assist health professionals to maintain professional standards and practice; and to acquire new and updated levels of knowledge, skills and ethical attitudes that will be of measurable benefit in enhancing professional practice and promoting professional integrity [3]. CPD is a deliberate ongoing learning process geared toward maintaining and improving professional proficiency and encourages self-reflection; improving and maintaining competencies; and keeping skills and knowledge up to date with developments in practice [4]. By requiring nurses, midwives and nursing assistants to undertake a minimum number of CPD points each year, the South African Nursing Council (SANC) aims to maintain professional standards to protect the public and promote the health of all members of the community [1,3,6]. In comparison to other professions, CPD in nursing is based on the philosophy that nursing education is an on-going, lifelong process, which does not cease on one's qualifying as a nurse [6,7]. It is important that nurses take the responsibility to identify their own learning needs and to ensure that these needs are met. Failure on the part of the professional nurses to learn continually could result in inadequate nursing care as the primary aim of CPD in nursing is the improvement of patient care [3,5].

Professional nurses need to have constant access to CPD activities to ensure safe nursing practice and of health care [1-5]. The reasons why professional nurses do not continue learning may vary between the availability of learning opportunities, cultural differences, institutional policies and the attitude of the nurse towards his/her own learning [3,7].

The African Health Professions Regulatory Collaboration (ARC) was established around 2012 with the aim to strengthen Nursing and Midwifery in the African Continent focussing on the QUAD model (clinical practice; facilitation of learning; leadership; evidence, research and development). African Countries, through the guidance of ARC, developed a CPD Toolkit to guide them to implement CPD for nurses and midwives. In South Africa, the SANC established a CPD Technical Working Group consisting of members nominated based on the QUAD model (with some moderation) with representation from SANC, professional associations, labour unions, public and private sector, National Department of Health (NDOH) provincial representatives, the Hospital Association of South Africa (HASA) and CPD researchers who were responsible for the drafting of the CPD Framework [8].

Providing proof of having undergone CPD will become compulsory as SANC will only issue Annual Practicing Certificates (APC) on receipt of a declaration of the CPD completed [9].

Research methods and design

This study followed a mixed-methods approach, using a survey to collect qualitative and quantitative data to determine the views of professional nurses in South Africa regarding CPD and post-graduate courses. The survey was developed using Survey Monkey™ with a mix of closed and open-ended questions. The objectives of the study were to determine professional nurses'

employment information and history, their nursing education, additional formal and informal education, and their awareness and perception of CPD for nurses. For the purposes of this article, we will be focussing on the respondents' awareness and perception of CPD. The survey was administered between July and December 2018.

A link to the survey was emailed to 897 participants and reminder emails were sent every 10 days to try and increase the amount of responses. Participants of this study included professional nurses working in both the public and private sector in South Africa. Non-random sampling was used, the researchers invited all the professional nurses on the Foundation for Professional Development's (FPD) database to participate. The researchers aimed to obtain at least 10% of the sample and participants were incentivised to participate in the survey through the chance to win a tablet device. Quantitative data was descriptively analysed in Microsoft Excel, qualitative data was analysed thematically.

It is important to note that this study was undertaken to inform the FPD Nursing School's strategy going forward, not for the purposes of research. Therefore ethical approval was not obtained.

Results

Demographics

One-hundred and twenty-nine responses (129) were received, resulting in a 14.3% response rate. Table 1 describes the demographics of the study sample. The majority of the respondents were female (83.72%) and 50 to 59 years old (35.66%).

		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	21	16.28%
	Female	108	83.72%
Age	Younger than 19	0	0.00%
	20 to 29 years	9	6.98%
	30 to 39 years	29	22.48%
	40 to 49 years	30	23.26%
	50 to 59 years	46	35.66%
	Older than 60	15	11.63%

Table 1: Sample demographics.

Employment and Education

The majority (67.44%) of respondents had been practicing as a nurse for between 11 and 40 years (Figure 1). The majority (91.47%) of respondents were employed on a full-time basis and were employed by either the South African Government (39.53%) or a private organisation (42.64%). Most of the respondents came from an urban area (67.44%). Table 2 summarises the respondents' primary place of employment, position held and number of years in their position. Twenty-two percent (22.48%) of respondents were employed at a private hospital, sixteen percent (16.28%) at a training institution, and eleven percent (11.63%) at a Primary Healthcare Clinic. In terms of the positions held by respondents, 34.11% indicated 'other' and 27.13% indicated 'professional nurse'. Positions included in the 'other' category included assistant

nurse, head of department, facility manager, among others.

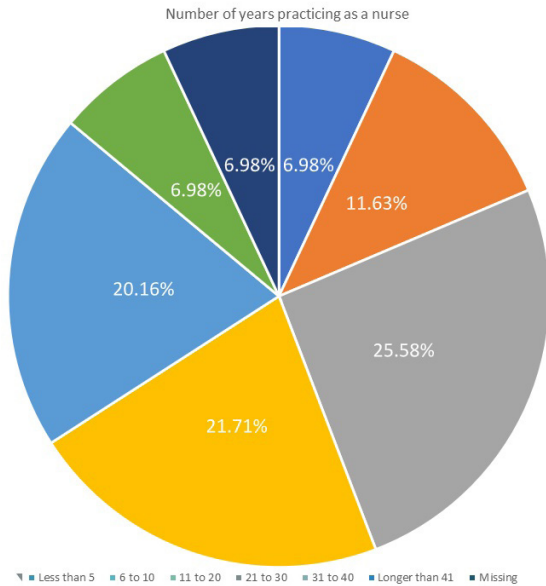


Figure 1: Number of years practicing as a nurse.

		Number	Percentage
Primary place of employment	Tertiary Hospital	7	5.43%
	Provincial hospital	3	2.33%
	District Hospital	11	8.53%
	Sub-district Hospital	0	0.00%
	Private Hospital	29	22.48%
	Community Healthcare Centre	6	4.65%
	Primary Healthcare Clinic	15	11.63%
	Pharmaceutical Company	0	0.00%
	Medical Aid company	1	0.78%
	Industry	0	0.00%
	NGO	2	1.55%
	Training Institution	21	16.28%
	Other	22	17.05%
	Missing	12	9.30%
Position	Professional nurse	35	27.13%
	Senior Professional Nurse	7	5.43%
	Chief Professional Nurse	12	9.30%
	Assistant Director	9	6.98%
	Deputy Director	6	4.65%
	Director	10	7.75%
	Other	44	34.11%
	Missing	6	4.65%
Number of years in position	Less than 5	53	41.09%
	6 to 10	29	22.48%
	11 to 20	27	20.93%
	21 to 30	8	6.20%
	31 to 40	7	5.43%
	Longer than 41	0	0.00%
	Missing	5	3.88%

Table 2: Respondents' primary place of employment.

The majority of respondents had an undergraduate Nursing Diploma (48.84%) and 35.66% had an undergraduate Nursing Bachelor's Degree (BCur, BSocSc, BA Nursing, BSc Nursing or BTech). Sixty-three percent of respondents had completed a postgraduate degree – the majority of which had obtained a postgraduate diploma in nursing (45.78%). Other postgraduate degrees included Master's in Public Health, Critical Care, Business Administration and a Doctorate in Business Administration.

CPD Awareness and Perception

When asked if they were aware of the concept of CPD, almost all (87.6%) respondents responded 'yes'. The large majority (77.52%) of respondents indicated that they did think that CPD should be compulsory for nurses in order to register with the SANC. Those who did not think that CPD should be compulsory for nurses reasoned that the cost involved would be too high, too much time would be needed to attend and complete courses, opportunities for nurses to obtain CPD points are scarce and forcing nurses to complete further education and training may frustrate them. When asked about the new SANC regulations regarding compulsory CPD for nurses, only 51.16% of respondents were aware of them.

Respondents perception of CPD was determined by asking them to rate their agreement with seven statements, from 1 to 5 with 1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'definitely', regarding the need for CPD. Table 3 summarises the responses for this question. The majority of respondents rated the statements as 5, 'definitely agree', demonstrating a positive perception of CPD and an understanding of the potential benefits of introducing compulsory CPD for nurses. Interestingly, only half of the respondents thought that CPD would improve job satisfaction and decreases burnout.

	1	2	3	4	5
The education and training of professional nurses should last through their career	4.00%	1.33%	4.00%	10.67%	80.00%
CPD plays an important role in maintaining and improving the quality and efficiency of the healthcare system	1.33%	1.33%	4.00%	8.00%	85.33%
CPD is essential for nurses to enable them to provide safe and effective care	5.33%	0.00%	4.00%	12.00%	78.67%
CPD improves job satisfaction and decreases burnout	8.00%	5.33%	18.67%	17.33%	50.67%
Employers want staff with appropriate skills and knowledge to deliver excellent care	1.33%	0.00%	2.67%	5.33%	90.67%
CPD is important for the enhancement of skills both professionally and personally	1.33%	0.00%	2.67%	12.00%	84.00%
CPD ensures that professions remain up to date in a changing world	1.33%	0.00%	4.00%	8.00%	86.67%
Average	3.24%	1.14%	5.71%	10.48%	79.43%

Table 3: Nurses' perception of CPD.

Responsibility for CPD

The large majority of respondents (49%) indicated that CPD is the joint responsibility of the employer and employee (the nurse). A few respondents also acknowledged the responsibility of the Regulating Body with regards to CPD. Respondents indicated that the primary responsibility for obtaining CPD points is that of the employee (the nurse), but that employers should provide the conditions and support needed to encourage nurses to obtain CPD points.

Barriers to implementing CPD for nurses

Respondents were asked to indicate what they thought the barriers to implementing CPD points for nurses would be by ranking barriers from most (1) to least important [12]. Findings show that the majority of respondents felt that Time was the most important barrier (42.67%) and Marketing and Advertising was the least important barrier (40%) to implementing CPD for Nurses (Box 1).

1)	Time
2)	Funding
3)	Family Responsibility
4)	Access to CPD resources
5)	Irrelevant topics
6)	Ability to attend CPD courses
7)	Motivation
8)	Commitment
9)	Difficulty
10)	Learning Culture
11)	Attitude
12)	Marketing and Advertising

Box 1: Barriers to implementing CPD for nurses.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that professional nurses in South Africa have an overall positive perception of CPD and the need to formalise and enforce the process. The respondents agreed that education should be a continuous process in order to improve the quality of care they provide, enhance their knowledge and skills, and remain up to date with the latest developments in the field.

The low number of respondents who are aware of the new SANC regulations should be taken note of. It is recommended that the SANC should ensure that nursing professionals are aware of new regulations that will have an effect on their ability to practice. It is further recommended that the SANC play a supportive role in ensuring that there are sufficient opportunities for nurses to obtain CPD points, taking into consideration the cost and time involved. Employers should also create conditions conducive to professional development, encourage nurses and facilitate opportunities to obtain CPD points. This includes assisting nurses in overcoming barriers such as the cost of enrolling in a course, time away from

work and family responsibilities.

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study: the relatively low response rate and non-random sampling means that the findings may not be representative of the entire population.

Conclusion

A changing health care environment is impacting the nurses' role in South Africa. Results from the study captured a snapshot of the current awareness and barriers to CPD from publicly and privately employed professional nurses in South Africa. The findings of the study indicated that the professional nurses included in the study are aware that they have a responsibility to continue their education and seek learning opportunities in order to address their learning needs after obtaining a basic nursing qualification. However there are barriers which prevent professional nurses to commit to continuing professional development. Nurses included in the study identified the following barriers: time, financial constraints, family responsibility, lack of advanced notification and staff shortages. The findings also indicated that professional nurses believed that the responsibility for CPD should be shared between them and their employers.

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