

THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNATIONAL NURSING PLACEMENTS ON CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND CAREER PLANNING

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International clinical placements are being increasingly included in undergraduate nursing programs in universities to prepare nurses to work with diverse cultures within their own country, and globally (Turale 2015). However little is known about their enduring impact.

Using an exploratory longitudinal approach this mixed methods study examined the influence of an international clinical placement of up to four weeks in developing countries on cultural competence and career planning in undergraduate nursing students from four Western Australian universities. Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews and quantitative data through administering the Inventory for Assessing the Process of Cultural Competence-Revised at pre-and post-international placement and again 12 months after return.

Our analysis revealed challenges and opportunities during the placement had enhanced students' appreciation for Australian nursing education and practice, and confirmed their capacity to engage in positive cultural interaction in diverse settings. However some participants were confronted by what they perceived to be a lack of

compassion in host country nurses, which they struggled to reconcile with the resource-poor environment and political context (Gower et al. 2017).

Whilst overall cultural competence scores increased immediately post-placement, and were maintained for 12 months, there was a surprising and significant drop in Cultural Skills (ability to communicate and ask questions of culturally diverse patients), Cultural Awareness (understanding of own biases and beliefs) and Cultural Desire (the willingness to become culturally competent) immediately post placement. This reflected the negative reactions in some of the qualitative findings. Scores in all three constructs returned to pre-placement levels 12 months after returning home, possibly reflecting greater feelings of self-efficacy and confidence once participants were able to apply their skills in the Australian setting.

Participants retained their pre-placement interest in career roles which offer variety and excitement, including international work. There was increased interest in roles requiring development of relationships with clients, including midwifery. However, students

were realistic about the constraints imposed by competing realities on their return to Australia, such as employment availability and family commitments.

Results documented that sending supervisors with in-country experience and support to explain how socio-economic, cultural and political factors contribute to health system priorities and nursing practices in the placement country enhances educational outcomes. This can help mitigate the sometimes confronting nature of placement encounters, and help students integrate their experience into post-placement practice.

Targeted learning activities are needed to ensure international clinical placements positively influence the global perspectives of students and highlight the importance of nursing and midwifery roles. This is important in the current climate of global migration of refugees, economic migrants, students, and health professionals. Activities need to target Cultural Desire in particular, as this is the basis upon which cultural competence is built.

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