**Editorial**

Lesley Baillie, Visiting Professor, London South Bank University

The quality and quantity of the nursing workforce is central to care quality and effective healthcare services. Therefore, how we prepare students during initial nurse education, and the continuing education of the nursing workforce, is a critical issue. This focus edition on nurse education includes papers that provide critical perspectives, reports of nursing curricula initiatives, and evaluations of approaches for teaching and learning, using different research approaches.

Nurse education has been transformed over the last few decades, driven by changes in society, higher education and healthcare policy, including funding arrangements. I’ve observed that, in the UK, changes to nurse education often attract interest from politicians, the public, and the media. It seems that some commentators expect nurse education to continue unchanged and nurses themselves often look back at their own initial education through ‘rose-coloured spectacles’, without acknowledging differences in healthcare at that time. My own nurse education started in 1974, following a standard apprenticeship-style route: learning while working in practice, with minimal supervision, interspersed with blocks of lectures. As student nurses, we provided most of the nursing workforce and our training was based mainly in hospitals, where healthcare delivery largely happened. There were many more hospital beds in those days, patients stayed in much longer but were often less ill, and the complexity of today’s patients, who have multiple co-morbidities, was rarely encountered. Indeed, many of us from those days will remember that recovering patients helped with teas and breakfasts in the wards! The contrast with healthcare today could not be greater and my initial nursing education, though adequate at the time, would certainly not have prepared me for today’s challenges. So, nurse education must continue to evolve and be proactive, not just reactive, about providing programmes that meet contemporary and future healthcare needs.

The importance of ensuring that nurse education prepares students for current and future healthcare needs is picked up well by Carol Hall and colleagues, as they report on their perspectives of the 2018 Federation of European Nurse Educators (FINE) conference, held in Malta. Here, nurse educators from across the world presented on contemporary challenges impacting on nurse education, along with sharing innovations and advances in education, best practice and research. The authors note common themes that impact on nurse education globally, including recruitment and retention of a high quality nursing workforce and the changing demographics of populations. It is pertinent for nurse educators to be mindful that the challenges we face are global, and not just confined to our own country, and Carol Hall et al. highlight the benefits of collaborating on nurse education across different countries. In this focus edition, Steven and colleagues from across Europe report on an innovative example of an Erasmus-funded project to enhance education about patient safety: the Shared LearnIng from Practice to improve Patient Safety (SLIPPS). The project is bringing together nursing students and educators from across Europe and is developing a tool to collect safety incidents from students, that will be used as the basis for educational activities. In her commentary, Maxwell suggests that the project should help students to understand the complexity of patient safety, though she also queries how the new approach will be evaluated, which must be considered for any educational innovation.

This focus edition includes two examples of teaching and learning innovations with papers reporting on student evaluations that have used surveys. The importance of evaluating new approaches cannot be overemphasised, as a means of providing evidence for effectiveness as well as highlighting areas for improvement. Surveys have the advantage of enabling students to respond anonymously and they can include large numbers of participants, particularly if electronically delivered. From Australia, Peddle’s evaluation of virtual simulation for developing non-technical skills, used an online survey, linked to completion of the simulations. Evaluations of traditional face-to-face simulation are consistently positive but delivery is highly resource intensive (Efstathiou and Walker, 2014), which can present a barrier in today’s financially challenged environment. Therefore, Peddle’s paper contributes important insights into how these skills can be developed through virtual simulation. Whilst development of effective resources for virtual simulation requires significant initial investment, unlimited numbers of students from a wide geographical area can access the materials, and students can learn at their own pace at a time that suits them, repeating the simulations as necessary.

In a further paper that presents students’ perceptions of a teaching and learning initiative, Kuti and Houghton explain one UK university’s approach to involving service users in nurse education, during which service users worked with students as coaches, linking experiences, values and reflection. The analysis of the students’ free text comments, along with results from the structured questions, indicated overwhelming support from students for the initiative. The approach enabled students to listen to service users’ experiences in a relaxed, small group setting, away from the high-pressured healthcare environment. The students’ free text comments indicated that they were able to understand the service users’ perspectives, which is a key principle for person-centred care (Brooker, 2003). In her commentary on the paper, Baillie highlights the importance of nurse educators supporting service users who are sharing personal experiences with students. Both evaluations included in this focus edition demonstrate how students’ perspectives of their learning can be elicited without too much additional resource, As with many other educational evaluations, neither study includes any data about subsequent impact on students’ actual practice but longitudinal studies of this type need considerable additional resources.

In Europe, in line with Article 31(3) of Directive 2005/36/EC, 50% of nursing curriculum hours are assigned to learning in practice, where we expect students to develop a range of competencies as they progress towards becoming qualified nurses. There is increasing recognition that student nurses need to develop emotional resilience, a requirement now included in the UK’s Nursing and Midwifery Council’s (2018) standards for nurse education. Therefore we must consider how to enable students to deal with the emotions they experience during practice learning. Kinsella Frost provides an important contribution to this focus edition on nurse education, with a paper explaining the use of art as a creative way to enable emotional debriefing, and how a narrative inquiry provided an in-depth understanding of the students’ experiences. Kinsella Frost suggests that there could be wider inclusion of art in nurse education and, in her commentary, Huet argues that embedding art helps to develop resilience, which should be a priority given that healthcare professionals are at such high risk of work-related stress.

One of the global challenges for healthcare, and therefore nursing education, is the increasing numbers of people who are living with dementia. An estimated third of hospital inpatients in high income countries have dementia (Alzheimer’s Disease International, 2016) but hospital staff have been found to lack the necessary knowledge and skills, and so improved education is necessary (Calnan et al., 2013; Clissett et al., 2014). In a second perspectives paper in this special edition, Knifton and colleagues from the UK-wide Higher Education Dementia Network (HEDN) argue for a comprehensive and consistent approach to educating the healthcare workforce to care for people who are living with dementia. The paper identifies that there are sound frameworks for dementia education produced by all four UK nations but the implementation of these, in each university, varies widely. The authors make recommendations for how we can ensure that dementia education is prioritised within nursing curricula, highlighting that the professional regulatory bodies, which approve healthcare curricula, could trigger more consistent, comprehensive approaches to dementia education by requiring universities to implement the expert standards. Whilst this paper originates from the UK, the perspectives expressed could prompt nurse educators in other countries to examine how dementia education is approached, from a national perspective.

In a second paper addressing the important area of dementia education, Knifton and Yates present a Foucaudian approach to understanding the framing of dementia and the implications for nurse education. The paper provides a unique contribution to our thinking about dementia education, whilst also reminding us that nurse education does not exist in a vacuum. Nurse educators might reflect on how the framing of other conditions could impact on how they address these in the curriculum too. In her commentary, Traynor suggests that Knifton and Yates’s paper might prompt nurse educators to examine how they approach dementia in the curriculum and to evolve from a focus on dementia as a medical condition, to approaches that help students to understand the meaning of living with dementia and how they can approach care in an empowering, rather than disabling, manner. As Traynor highlights, this Foucauldian analysis has wide relevance across pre-and post registration education for healthcare professionals.

Nursing students are investing in their careers and employability is an important goal of any pre-registration nursing programme. In a pre-test post-test quasi-experimental study based in Egypt, Hashish and colleaguesinvestigated the effect of career-awareness sessions with nursing students, as well as the relationship between career and talent development self-efficacy and career barriers. The results indicated that the sessions had a positive impact on students, with career barriers decreasing and career and talent development self-efficacy scores increasing significantly. In her commentary on the paper, Coverdale highlights how, particularly with the current crisis in recruitment and retention of nurses, it is so important that nurses entering the profession have career awareness. Therefore, Hashish et al.‘s paper provides important evidence for the impact of sessions focused on career awareness during nurse education.

Whilst many of this focus edition’s papers concern mainly initial nurse education, Markey et al.’ s paper explores a different aspect: the experiences of internationally prepared nurses who are undertaking post-graduate study in a different country, in this case, Ireland. As Darch notes in her commentary, many universities are striving to recruit international students but the focus tends to be on the curriculum and not necessarily student experiences. Many universities are recruiting international students from varying subject disciplines, including nursing, and we need to understand these students’ experiences. Markey et al. used a qualitative approach and the interviews revealed the complexities and challenges international nursing students encountered during MSc studies, as they dealt with the differing realities and learnt new ways. Markey et al. raise the importance of focusing not just on international recruitment but the structures and processes to nurture intercultural learning.

The authors contributing to this focus edition, and the commentators, are based in different countries and so offer global perspectives, highlighting the common challenges nurse educators encounter when preparing nursing students for contemporary healthcare. In most papers, we gain perspectives from key stakeholders: the students themselves. As we continue through the 21st century, it is essential for nurse educators to reflect critically on the impact of societal and healthcare changes and for nurse education to continue to evolve, to meet future challenges.

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