

Abstract

Identifying Gaps in the Nutritional Education of Nurses [†]

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Abstract: Evidence suggests that many nurses are unable to provide nutritional care in clinical practice. A modification of the nursing curriculum is needed to enable nurses to apply this knowledge more effectively in clinical practice and improve patient outcomes. Aim: To identify gaps in nurses' nutritional knowledge, skills, and confidence to counsel, to enable recommendations to modify the nursing curriculum. All 89 third-year nursing students at one New Zealand university were invited to participate in the validated NUTCOMP questionnaire, which assessed self-perceived nutritional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and confidence to counsel through QUALTRICS. A steering group including Maori, Pacific and Asian health researchers, nurse practitioners, registered nutritionists, and dietitians was established to develop a focus group for questions related to perspectives on nurses' nutritional education and application in clinical practice. Students, lecturers, clinical staff, and dietitians working in hospitals, communities, or residential care homes were invited to attend one of four focus groups. Data were analysed for themes regarding nurses' nutritional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and confidence to counsel. The response rate for the questionnaire was 76.4% ($n = 68$). Students reported a high (mean score \pm SD 35.2 ± 3.4 , out of 40) importance of nutritional care, with 81% perceiving a need for further nutritional education. Participants reported moderate confidence in nutritional knowledge and skills (20.2 ± 3.4 out of 35, and 31.5 ± 5.9 out of 50, respectively). Twenty-one health professionals participated in focus groups with 4–6 students per group. All participants agreed that nurses need competency in basic nutritional care. Three themes related to nutritional care emerged from the discourse analysis: the importance of cultural and family context; a team approach; and appropriate placement in the nursing curriculum. Undergraduate nurses perceive a need for further nutritional education to enable them to provide nutritional care in (clinical) practice. The findings from this study provide direction for improvements in nutritional education to the undergraduate nursing curriculum.

Keywords: nutrition care; nurses; education; NUTCOMP

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