

Why Nurses Should Continue Their Professional Education?

The enthusiasm and the striking need of practicing nurses for continuing professional development (CPD) was observed in a one-day workshop conducted on the 21st of September 2022 by the Department of Nursing and Midwifery, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Kothelawala Defence University for university academia and practicing nurses. The workshop aimed at introducing the 'concept of continuing professional development' and to explore the ways and means of its delivery. The need for developing a systematic pathway to enhance continuing professional education was expressed by the participants. There can be barriers such as lack of time, crowded wards and poor staffing that affect CPD. However, the real and unnoticed barriers can be lack of motivation and interest among nurses to continue learning and engage in CPD.

Nursing is a profession within the healthcare sector focused on the care of individuals, families and communities so that they may attain, maintain or recover optimal health and quality of life. Regular update of skills and continuing education, or CPD is a mandatory requirement for all health care professionals including nurses. CPD refers to the process of on-going education and development of healthcare professionals, from initial qualifying education and for the duration of professional life, in order to maintain competence to practice and increase professional proficiency and expertise" (Pool, 2016, p.1). It enables the provision of renewed, evidence-based, effective and good quality care in health care settings. Simply, CPD is nurses' professional ability beyond pre-registration training, qualification and induction, thereby potentially enhancing the clinical practice.

Formal or informal CPD programmes are key to nurses' lifelong learning and to keep nurses' knowledge and skills up-to-date (Mlambo et al., 2021). The requirement for nurses to participate

in CPD differs between most high-income countries and other countries. For example, CPD is a mandatory condition by nurse regulators in the UK, Australia, Belgium, Spain, and some states in the United States of America (Ross et al., 2013, Brekelmans et al, 2013, James et al., 2011) and Thailand (The National Health Professional Education Foundation, 2021). However, in Sweden, Netherlands and Ireland, nurses participate in CPD of their own volition (Mlambo et al., 2021). It is noteworthy that where CPD is mandatory, nurses engage in continuing education relevant to their areas of practice. CPD requires the acquisition of knowledge and skills transfer by the practising nurse to maintain licensure and competent practice.

There can be different ways of learning and education, both formal and informal. For example, formal learning through higher education, research, appraising literature for best evidence through journal clubs, mentorship, attending courses or workshops, in-service programmes, self-reflection, group discussions with colleagues and peer feedback are different ways of CPD. Evidence from CPD literature indicates that many nurses prefer informal work-based methods of learning, noting that most meaningful learning occurs through interactions with their colleagues (Zaleska & De Menezes, 2007). Mentoring, supervision, attending team meetings/briefings and constructive feedback make CPD more meaningful. This will bring us to discuss the importance of on-site learning with mentoring and clinical supervision of students.

In the Sri Lankan context, an important aspect of this educational experience is the training and guidance provided by the qualified nursing staff, in the form of clinical mentoring or student supervision, enabling them to learn and develop appropriate clinical competencies to ensure

quality and safety of nursing care. Clinical placements are an essential aspect of nursing education worldwide, enabling students to apply theory into practice, learn key skills and achieve the required competencies for registration as a qualified nurse (Bellman et al., 2002). Learning in the clinical setting enables students to overcome many challenges and develop the ability to tackle issues related to patient care. Lifelong learning is promoted and enhanced during this training process. The willingness of ward managers and senior nurses to facilitate learning reflects by the provision of time and space for learning to occur within the clinical areas. As Bertrand Russell stated once, no man can be a good teacher unless he has feelings of warm affection toward his pupils and a genuine desire to impart to them what he believes to be of value.

Having identified the need, it is high time that the authorities take immediate action to develop standards and introduce ways of CPD to enhance the knowledge, reflexivity skills and competencies of Sri Lankan nurses. We believe, active engagement and involvement in lifelong learning and CPD will enable them to become role models for future generations.

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