

Students' views and recommendations toward teaching the clinical practice in undergraduate curricula

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Abstract: Nursing student's experiences of their clinical practice provide greater insight to develop an effective clinical teaching strategy in nursing education. Insights gained from exploring these perspectives would hopefully provide signposts for the teaching of in nursing schools. The aim of this study was to explore of students' views and recommendations toward teaching the clinical nursing practice in undergraduate nursing curricula at nursing school in Saudi Arabia. Six focus groups were used to obtain students' opinion and experiences about their clinical practice. 60 baccalaureate nursing students at king Abdulaziz (Faculty of Nursing) were selected randomly from two hundred students and were arranged in six groups of 10 students. To analyze the data the method used to code and categories focus group data were adapted from approaches to qualitative data analysis. Four themes emerged from the focus group data, namely nursing clinical experience, teaching and learning experiences, teachers' roles and bridging the gaps between theory and practice. The first theme identified some of the challenges faced in nursing schools and is labelled "clinical experience" with very sick patients. The second theme that was identified related to "Teaching and learning experience" such as teaching students about health promotion with patients to reduce "task oriented" teaching methods and focus on "relationship oriented". The third theme to emerge from the focus group discussions concerned the "teachers' role", with there being recognition that nursing students need role models such as nursing educators and staff nurses in their educational and practice settings. The final theme that the nurse student talked about focused on "bridging the gap between theory and practice" (curriculum), reflecting the need to apply and articulate theoretical knowledge within clinical practice settings. In conclusion, this study has highlighted a variety of issues that should be addressed by both nursing school and higher education, which may be able to contribute to increased recruitment of new graduates. Nursing students need some career counselling to direct them to a specialized area that the country needs. Furthermore, education and training in the clinical placement should be seriously considered at the undergraduate level. An important factor in improving students' desire to work in nursing is providing them with an opportunity to acquire positive and pleasant clinical experiences in different settings.

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1.Introduction

Nursing education in Saudi Arabia began in 1958 with the establishment of a health education institution for boys in Riyadh based on a 5-year contract between the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the World Health Organization after which the MOH assumed full responsibility for the institution, and 15 students were enrolled. At that time, the only major programme offered was health inspection. In 1960, two nursing schools for girls were established in Riyadh and Jeddah. The education programme for nurses included the curriculum of fifth and sixth elementary level and nursing assistant grade. In late 1970, Gulf countries agreed to accept students with at least intermediate certificates. Nursing schools were converted into health institutes and the number within the kingdom increased to 25. By 1993, the total number of health institutions was 42 (17 for boys and

25 for girls). Also in 1993, a higher standard of admission (high school diploma) was established to enter these health academies (Al-Osimy, 1994).

In Saudi Arabia, the MOH and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) oversee nursing education. The MOH provides health institutions and intermediate colleges for male and female students, while the MOHE offers Bachelors' and Masters' Degrees in Nursing Science for female students. In 1973, the MOHE established higher education programmes in nursing. At King Saud University in Riyadh, under the supervision of the Applied Medical Science division, a department of nursing for women was established. In 1987, a graduate programme of nursing for women was opened in the same college that offered a Master of Science in Nursing. In the same year, a department of nursing for women was established at King Faisal University in Dammam,

and a Bachelor of Science degree was offered at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah in 1976. Graduates of the baccalaureate programme are qualified to practice professional nursing in a variety of health care settings, and for entrance into a graduate education programme for clinical specialisation and functional areas. The programme faculty believes that learning is an internal process and is evidenced by changes in the behaviour of the individual .

The curriculum at the undergraduate nursing programme is a five-year programme leading to the degree of Bachelor of Science in Nursing, the BSN. Clinical placements for the programme are provided through arrangements with a variety of hospitals and other health care facilities for the purposes of accomplishing course objectives. Clinical practice is under the supervision of the university nursing faculty. The curriculum is based on concepts, principles and theories from various disciplines together with the nursing process. Through the nursing process, the student learns to establish priorities and learns present and future interventions in patient care. Significantly, Al-Osimy (1994) states:

"Nursing in Saudi Arabia is a holistic service profession which is sanctioned by society to meet the health needs of the population and is influenced by the changing need of the society. The practice of nursing encompasses the prevention of illness, the promotion, the maintenance and restoration of health as well as the rehabilitation of the individual to his maximum potential. The foundation of professional nursing education and practice are based upon principles, theories and concepts from physical, biological and behavioural and the humanities".(p,59)

The philosophy of the undergraduate nursing programme supports the programme within the overall mission of the university. The nursing programme recognizes each human being's uniqueness of mind, body and spiritual being and is dedicated to caring for human beings at any point in the life cycle. The nursing curriculum prepares its graduates to care for human beings, with respect for their personal worth, dignity and feelings, and recognizes rights and responsibilities. Academic excellence is promoted by encouraging sound judgment and critical thinking through the integration of social, behavioural and biological sciences. The

nursing programme believes that the concepts of human beings, the environment, health and nursing are essential components of a nursing curriculum.

In Saudi Arabia, nursing education programs were developed to provide the knowledge, skills, attitudes and value of the role for those who have chosen to work in the nursing profession. With the continuous improvement and upgrading of nursing education and nursing practices, graduate education programmes in nursing have been developed in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Universities welcome applications from female Saudi Nationals with the personal qualities, intelligence and motivation essential for the study of nursing in a university. In this study, the participating offer nursing studies only to females; for that reason, all participants were female and the resulting limitations should be borne in mind. Furthermore, with the progress of the medical sciences, nursing has occupied an important place among health services in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Tumulty (2001) proposed that degrees in nursing are promising in terms of future careers in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the delivery of nursing services in Saudi Arabia, in both governmental and private sectors, has recently become dependent on expatriate nurses from throughout the world. Alshahri (2002) reports that, at present, the health care system is mainly staffed by non-Saudi health care professionals, employed from across the world. As a majority of the nurses have different training backgrounds and nationalities, there are obvious diversities in the nursing care provided by different institutions. In Saudi Arabia, Aldossary *et al* (2008) suggested that:

"The challenges for Saudi Arabia are increasing its proportion of indigenous nurses who will be able to deliver culturally appropriate high quality care and to share the Arabic language with their patients. Without this, it may prove difficult to deliver effective health education in Nursing work". (P128)

In fact, the reason for the shortage of Saudi female nurses is not due to avoidance of this profession, but due to the attrition rate of Saudi nurses, and all hospitals have complained of shortages of nurses (Al-Osimy, 1994). There is a need to examine and monitor the attrition rate of Saudi nurses to maintain an accurate and effective system of keeping records. However, Saudi Arabia has not yet effectively expanded its nursing workforce to meet the health care demands of the Saudi population compared with other countries, especially with regard to older people. Furthermore,

El Sanabary (1993) reports that in the midst of rapid socio-economic change in Saudi Arabia, there are three development areas for female health care professionals: (1) the vast expansion of female education and the desire to provide culturally and female-appropriate occupations, (2) the rapid expansion of health care facilities and the government's commitment to train much-needed health workers, and (3) the heavy reliance on expatriate health personnel and the desire to replace them with Saudis (p.1332).

The current acute shortage of qualified Saudi nurses in the hospitals and health centres dictates an urgent review of the kingdom's present and future nursing training, especially in the older people care. Nevertheless, Miller-Rosser *et al* (2006) claim that Saudi women are slowly becoming employed as nurses and allied health workers, although Saudi females who select nursing as a future career face many obstacles, such as the poor image of such work in Saudi society. There is a lack of standard of nursing care due to a multinational workforce with different educational backgrounds; there is often no uniform system of nursing care in the kingdom. Furthermore, the training programme for nurses faces some problems in Saudi Arabia. There has always been a shortage of applicants, especially Saudi females, mainly because the role model of a nurse or a health assistant is not popular in Saudi society. In many instances, office work is the path for promotion, which drains technical persons to administrative jobs. Furthermore, marriage frequently deters Saudi females from continuing their career. In the light of this, it was a shortage of nurse clinical tutors/instructors and that contributes to the poor continuing nursing education in the kingdom (Alosimy, 1994).

On the other hand, the future demand for health care workers to meet the needs of older people can be expected to grow appreciably in Saudi Arabia (Omer, 1997). The Kingdom urgently needs a research assessment or planning activity designed to provide information for a policy to increase the number of Saudi nurses. At present, the health care system in Saudi Arabia will have to adapt to the increasing proportion of older people by promoting the training of health care workers such as nurses in gerontology nursing. Nonetheless, the kingdom needs to increase its supply of Saudi nurses greatly, particularly to provide culturally competent care for the increasing number of older people. Alosimy (1994) states:

"Nurses are faced by the two major challenges in Saudi Arabia. The first is to help society clearly understand how the nurse's role

has changed, and to communicate what her present role is. The second is to identify how nurses can improve their service, and how consumers can effectively help nurses clearly understand their actual/potential health needs. The immediate future of nursing offers substantive challenges". (p.77)

In conclusion, the current acute shortage of qualified Saudi nurses in hospitals and health centres dictates an urgent review of the kingdom's present and future nursing training, especially in the area of the clinical placement. Such training needs should be considered by the schools of nursing as a primary line to produce nurses. This should be the first priority in the planning of health development in Saudi Arabia.

2. Material and Methods

The focus group in this study was anticipated to play an important role in achieving the aim of this research, to fill the gap and build bridges in nursing education in order to improve teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, focus groups can provide major insights into attitudes, beliefs and opinions. Gray-Vicker (1993) promotes focus groups as useful method of collecting data. On the other hand, the rationale for the use of qualitative methods in this study was to provide an exploratory base. Six focus groups were conducted with nursing students to explore the perceived status of clinical nursing education in the undergraduate nursing curricula in Saudi Arabia. Bowling (1997) states that focus groups are unstructured interviews with small groups of people who interact with each other and with the group leader. The focus groups in this study were held at the university, at the campus where the nursing lecturers were based. Morgan (1996) proposes that focus groups can also be combined with surveys, as shown in this study. The students realised that the focus group discussions used in this study would be useful in helping to interpret the findings from the quantitative approach, to give meaning to the numbers.

1. What are nursing students' views and recommendations toward teaching the clinical nursing practice in undergraduate nursing curricula?

Six focus groups, each comprising 10 nursing students from the nursing faculty, discussed the status of the clinical nursing education in nursing curricula. The focus groups were held at West University in Saudi Arabia. The participants in the focus groups

comprised of 60 nursing students in nursing school at West university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from June- March 2013. The main purpose was to discuss with them the status of the clinical nursing education in the undergraduate nursing curricula in Saudi Arabia. A convenience sample was used for six focus groups, with each group containing 10 members, including from each specialty: medical surgical nursing, fundamental nursing and community health nursing from West University. Mixed groups with homogenous characteristics are usually preferable in focus group discussions (Grbich, 2000). The reason for selecting participants from various branches was because in the nursing curriculum, integrated courses between theory and practice are mainly included in the above three specialties. Each focus group discussion was audiotaped (following respondents' consent) so that all information was documented and could be accessed repeatedly during analysis. This study involved focus group discussions, lasting one to one-and-a-half hours, being conducted in meeting rooms.

Discussion with nursing students focused on their views and commitment toward teaching the clinical nursing in undergraduate nursing curricula. Insights gained from exploring these perspectives would hopefully provide signposts for the teaching of in nursing schools. The following issues were covered:

1. The students' clinical experiences in nursing school with ill and well people in hospital, nursing home and community settings.
2. Knowledge or skills among nursing students with regard to caring for patients in the clinical experiences.
3. The Nursing programme and the part played by nurse educators as role models promoting work with sick people in the clinical area.

Ethical Permission was sought for this study and I sent invitation letters with stamped addressed envelopes to nursing students from medical surgical nursing, fundamental nursing and community health nursing specialties, asking them to share their thoughts on their clinical experiences in nursing school. Nursing students who agreed to participate in group discussions were able to return their reply slips with an envelope addressed to the investigator via the university postal system. I contacted the students to discuss the plan for the focus group, such as the time and place, and asked them to sign a consent form. The meeting rooms used were also convenient students, as they were close to their classrooms. I also provided more information about the study and clarified any questions about the study. Prior to the

meeting, I called the students to confirm the date, time and the place of the focus group meetings.

3. Results

Nursing student's experiences of their clinical practice provide greater insight to develop an effective clinical teaching strategy in nursing education. Insights gained from exploring these perspectives would hopefully provide signposts for the teaching of in nursing school. As was highlighted in the focus group discussions, from which several themes emerged. The first theme identified some of the challenges faced in nursing schools and is labelled "clinical experience" with very sick people. With regard to attitude, the groups reflected on the potential for clinical experiences to change nursing students' attitudes and emphasized the importance of them acquiring knowledge on nursing, especially in the community setting: "*Students must be exposed to well people in the community to change their views towards Nursing in order to improve their knowledge and attitudes and encourage them to select future careers*".

With respect to clinical experiences, particular emphasis was placed on that gained in nursing. It was acknowledged that there were insufficient well-prepared the clinical placements to participate effectively in clinical training, and this had a significant impact on nursing students' desire to work with. Nurse educators reflected that: "*our current nursing placements are not well prepared for nursing students' training*". The second theme that was identified related to "Teaching and learning experience" such as teaching students about health promotion with patients to reduce "task oriented" teaching methods and focus on "relationship oriented" approaches: "*We need to minimise the task-oriented method of teaching and shift to relationship-oriented methods*" and "*these educational experiences will enhance teachers' ability to work with students in the classroom as well as in the clinical arena*".

The third theme to emerge from the focus group discussions concerned the "teachers' role", with there being recognition that nursing students need role models such as nursing educators and staff nurses in their educational and practice settings. Such individuals should be enthusiastic about the care of patients: "*Nursing students need expert role models who prefer to work with sick individuals as clinical instructors during clinical practice*". The final theme that the nurse educators talked about focused on "bridging the gap between theory and practice" (curriculum), reflecting the need to apply and articulate theoretical knowledge within clinical practice settings: "*a strong need for a core*

curriculum to bridge the gap between theories and practice” and “Nursing students should have the opportunity to interact with the theoretical content of

ageing in clinical experience”. These themes and categories are now considered in summarised in Table.

Table 1. Theme development from student' perspectives on the clinical training from six focus group discussions.

| Theme | Category | Illustrates |
|---|-----------------------------|--|
| Clinical experiences | Nursing students' attitudes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive clinical experiences can change nursing students' knowledge and attitudes toward nursing. • Students must be exposed to well older people in the community to change their attitudes towards and knowledge nursing. |
| | Nursing placement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our current nursing placements are not well prepared for nursing students' training. • Nursing speciality in Saudi are still in the early stages of development. • Nursing students need good quality placements for clinical training. |
| Teaching and learning | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well planned curriculum is essential, with experiential learning to help students to improve quality care • Helping students to feel confident about interacting with patients is important. • Using different approaches in the teaching and learning process with regard to the care of sick people. |
| Teacher's role | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursing students need expert role models. • We are short of staff. • Nursing schools need qualified teachers to teach nursing students both in the classroom and in the clinical arena. |
| Bridging the gap between theory and practice (Curriculum) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for a core curriculum. • We need some evidence to supports the adoption of one curriculum design over another. |

4. Discussion

Based upon the results of the current study and as a teacher in nursing schools, working as a student preceptor with nursing students, I frequently identify nursing students' desire to help others as a major reason for entering nursing. Some nursing student suggested that clinical nursing should be integrated throughout the entire nursing programme with increasing time and more nursing information in all areas of the programme, such as fundamental nursing, community health and psychiatric nursing. Other suggested that students nursing should be offered as a separate training clinical course alone, with a focus on teaching Nursing theories linked to clinical practice. Despite this, the participants found it difficult to reach agreement on the best way to include the clinical nursing training in the curriculum and equal support was found for the arguments about including lectures as an integrated course (across the curriculum). Moreover, it may be necessary for nursing schools to develop a relationship with nursing staff in care settings to provide opportunities for positive experiences through affiliation between the clinical placements and the schools. Ferguson

(1996) reported the importance of the relationship between the clinical student preceptor and their students. The collaboration of nursing schools and clinical care settings to develop plans for teaching nursing is considered a new notion in Saudi nursing education and is recommended by this current study.

Students reflected that the clinical training on the nursing curriculum are inconsistent and relatively meagre, with significant gaps, and that they need to be revised to bridge the gap between theory and practice. On the other hand, there were also factors that hindered their clinical experience. Several authors (Hewison & Wildman, 1996; Hopton, 1995; Wilson-Thomas, 1995; Ferguson & Jinks, 1994; Wilson-Barnett, Butterworth, White, Twinn, Davies & Riley, 1995) have found the incongruity regarding the theory-practice gap as a cause of stress and low self confidence among nursing students in the clinical arena. In the group discussions, emerged that the nursing programme in nursing school currently provide limited theoretical and clinical preparation for nursing students. Nursing students reflected that the nursing curriculum should include more extensive clinical experience in different clinical placements

settings. Generally, therefore, nurse educators were critical of the current nursing curriculum, which had been designed to focus on theoretical content and clinical experiences in specialty areas such as medical-surgical, mental health, community health, maternity and child nursing. Interestingly, the focus group discussions concluded that it was necessary to include material on clinical training earlier in the nursing programme (first semester), so that it could serve as a foundation on which to build nursing students' attitudes at the early stage of their clinical nursing training.

The group discussions shed light on the importance of evaluating and revising the nursing curriculum especially in the clinical arena. Further revision is needed to meet both the current needs of nursing students and the future health needs of Saudi Arabia. Participants felt that experts and specialist nursing educators must evaluate and revise the nursing curriculum regularly to identify any deficiencies and initiate the required changes in academic nursing to reflect changes in Saudi society especially in the clinical area. Furthermore, focus group participants drew attention to the need to provide quality placements for the clinical nursing training and that will influence nursing students' choices toward careers. The result pointed out that clinical experiences might significantly influence nursing students' choices. This result suggests that clinical experiences are essential to reinforce concepts and to promote nursing students' understanding and interest in caring for sick people. Furthermore, these clinical experiences should focus on the different needs of, including health teaching and guidance to maintain wellness. However, clinical experiences at many BSN programmes are geared toward the care of acutely ill patients who dwell in hospitals and nursing homes. However, it has been shown that, exposure to unpredictable clinical experiences with very ill people only can damage students' attitudes and thus influence their future career options (Stevens and Crouch, 1992, 1995). Conversely Sheffler (1995) and Hartley *et al* (1995) reported positive effects of clinical experiences with sick people.

In this light, the focus group discussions in this study revealed that the student nurses had varying experiences in adult settings, some of which could have had the effect of turning them away from the nursing specialty, while others would have encouraged them to consider the care of people as a career choice. Given the importance of clinical experiences in nursing education, Williams *et al* (2007) suggested a need to explore such issues in clinical experiences that influence students' selection of nursing as an area of specialization after

graduation, as this will be interesting for nurse educators and employers. Hanson and Waters (1991) point out the faculty involvement in education must come first because the nursing faculty is the most significant role model for modelling the specific professional values of students (Caris Verhallen *et al.*, 1999; Hartley *et al.*, 1995; Kwan and Law, 1994; Harrison & Novak, 1988).

Consequently, in this study, nurse students suggested that positive clinical experience in nursing can improve the development of nursing students' professional skills by putting theory into practice, and by helping students to choose job opportunities with patients in future in response to the increasing size of the Saudi population. Alongside this, several studies have explored the effect of clinical placement on nurses' attitudes and willingness to care (Brown *et al*, 2008 a, b; Brown, 2006; Nolan *et al*, 2002; Tovin *et al*, 2002; Hoffman, 2000; Roberts-Rudd, 1984; Tennes-Moseley, 1995). In line with this, in the present study, nursing students view clinical experiences with well people as a significant way of improving students' attitudes towards nursing. The effectiveness of this view is supported by several previous studies (Eddy, 1986; Ross, 1983; Tobiason *et al*, 1979; Evans, 1969).

Alongside this, this study showed an appreciation of experiential learning in nursing education, which is necessary to underpin many of the different types of teaching activities in clinical placement experience, such as health promotion programmes in community courses. Significantly, Brown *et al* (2008) described the importance of the role of clinical placement experience in structuring student nurses' perceptions. Perhaps such clinical experiences with well people in the community will give nursing students a different perspective on nursing care, which is not apparent either in acute care in the hospital or in the nursing home setting. Similarly, Collins and Brown (1989) report positive outcomes after beginning clinical experience with well people.

Therefore, this study raised important issues in teaching and learning clinical experiences, such as teaching health promotion in the community, completing functional and physical assessments and encouraging students to visit service agencies during their clinical training. These experiential forms of learning will facilitate the teaching of nursing content in the classroom as well as in the clinical arena, as the participants in this study suggested. Similarly, Penner *et al* (1984) suggested that the more time staff members spent with patients, the more positive their attitudes. Furthermore, in this study, it was found that nursing students' attitudes after clinical experiences with clients in their first and last years of

study become more positive. In this light, Soderhamn *et al* (2001) reported that attitudes towards clients might change with clinical experience, while Langland *et al* (1986) found a significant improvement in nursing students' attitudes after clinical experiences. However, in this study, contact with very sick patients in the clinical area has helped some Saudi students to focus on the positive aspects patients. Perhaps increasing the amount of time students spend in the clinical area would increase their positive training. In conclusion, this study indicates that clinical experiences helped some students to develop positive relationships with sick people and to understand them more deeply, and these positive and enriching experiences have encouraged them to accept caring for patients as a future career choice. Hence, contact with sick people has helped some students to focus on the positive aspects of this group of patients and enhanced their positive attitudes: this is a factor that may eventually influence their career decisions. Any effort to improve nursing education must also focus on nursing educators themselves. They must examine their own knowledge and attitudes about clinical training and rise to the challenge that. The clinical training nursing content is currently limited in the undergraduate nursing curricula and the teachers were critical of this. The nursing curriculum at nursing college in Saudi Arabia is still in its relative infancy in terms of nursing education and the current undergraduate programmes provide limited theoretical and clinical preparation for a career in this field. This limited preparation is thought to be reflected in the quality of care provided for Saudi people.

5. Implications

The present study has examined nursing students views toward teaching the clinical practice in undergraduate. However, efforts to improve nursing education in Saudi Arabia must be focused primarily on the clinical preparation within nursing curriculum in nursing school, as this study suggests. There are many positive and innovative approaches to encourage nursing students to work with sick people, especially in clinical experiences: a positive approach in training and teaching nursing might need to be advanced in some way to be more attractive and interesting for nursing students. Clinical nursing preceptors and nurses staff can develop students learning by encouraging a positive learning placements and playing as role models. In the clinical settings, nurses must orient themselves to include nursing students as part of the health care team and help them in the achievement of their nursing goals and programme outcomes. This study shows that

clinical teachers and nurses staff make a vital contribution to the teaching and learning process among nursing students. Collaborative relationships between clinical nursing preceptors and nurses staff can be a significant elements in the nursing school. This study suggests the importance of students' placement experiences as enriching environments and the factors to enhance this enriching environment are considered to improve the view of nursing.

However, this current study provides information that will be helpful for decision-makers in planning educational programmes in nursing within nursing schools. The results of the study provide an additional rationale for questioning the efficacy of changing nursing students' performances. The major significance of the study is that it provides recommendations to nursing schools for more effective curriculum development and planning in nursing education especially in the clinical placements. Improving nursing students' views about the consequences of employment in nursing should increase their interest in such work, and thus should become a major assumption when planning nursing curricula. This challenge could be a major influence in stimulating the change needed in nursing in Saudi Arabia. Ultimately, this study could have a positive influence on the number of graduates who are willing to work with sick people. However, the more immediate consequences of the study would be changes in nursing curricula, which will improve student nurses' work performances toward nursing.

On the other hand, my commitment to increasing the number of nursing students still faces considerable difficulties in Saudi Arabia. In conclusion, this study has highlighted a variety of issues that should be addressed by both nursing schools and higher education, which may be able to contribute to increased recruitment of new graduates toward nursing. In Saudi Arabia, if society's expectations of quality care for people are to be achieved in the next century, then student nurses will need to view working as health providing a more attractive and bright future if nursing wants to keep the nursing specialty within its professional field. Saudi nursing students need some career counselling to direct them to a specialized area that the country needs. Furthermore, education and training in the clinical placements should be seriously considered at the undergraduate level. An important factor in improving students' desire to work in nursing is providing them with an opportunity to acquire positive and pleasant clinical experiences in different settings.

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