Evaluating a critical care course

A study looked at how final-year student nurses felt they benefited from taking part in a critical care course. Nurses and Midwifery at Queen’s University Belfast took part in the two-day course. These students were doing their final placement before qualifying.

**Data collection and analysis**

A 16-item Likert scale questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data. An open-ended response section was also included to collect qualitative responses.

The study questionnaire was designed to establish: students’ perceptions and attitudes in relation to confidence in caring for patients; and improvement in knowledge and skills.

In addition to the quantitative assessment, we analysed qualitative responses on a thematic basis. Qualitative aspects of the questionnaire sought information on the elements of the course that students valued the most and the least, and any other comments they wished to make.

**Results**

Of the 182 students who took part in the course, 135 completed questionnaires. Findings established that participants felt positively about the course.

**Confidence in caring for critically ill patients**

Most (90%) of the respondents (n=121) agreed or strongly agreed that the two-day course had improved their confidence in caring for critically ill patients.

Qualitative comments supported this. One student said: “I feel the critical care course was very beneficial to my practice. It has provided me with confidence.”

**Improvement of knowledge and skills**

When participants were asked if they felt their knowledge and skills had improved by the end of the course, 88% (n=119) responded positively.

Most participants (87%, n=117) said that all final-year student nurses should complete critical care training.

**Discussion**

The results from this evaluation demonstrate that students who took part in this course had a positive experience.

The results also showed the value of placing it at the end of a student’s third year, just before registration. Most participants valued the opportunity to revisit material on assessing and managing critically ill patients.

Students who took part in the course felt their confidence in caring for critically ill patients had been enhanced.

**Conclusion**

The positive attitudes of undergraduate nurses support the introduction of critical care training. The success of this course highlights a need for more education on this subject area in the undergraduate nursing curriculum.

Essential skills including assessment, management and effective communication concerning deteriorating patients should be taught throughout the curriculum. A student-selective module concentrating on critical illness may go some way to addressing challenges of assessment and managing critically ill patients.


**References**


Keywords: Acutely ill/Competence/Confidence/Deteriorating patient/Early recognition skills

- This article has been double-blind peer reviewed