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Examining the Demand for Higher Education Nursing in Relation to the Nursing Shortage

Avani Thakkar
a.thakkar101@gmail.com

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Background: At the forefront of care, nurses account for the largest sector of clinical providers; as of 2016, there were nearly 4 million active nurses in the United States (Snively, 2016). Nonetheless, the United States has encountered an extreme nursing shortage since the beginning of the 21st century. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates a global shortage of 9 million nurses by 2030. Furthermore, approximately 36% of nursing positions within the United States are expected to remain vacant by 2020 (Wright & Bretthauer, 2010).

Although the dramatic shortage of nurses in the United States remains a prevalent public health concern, patient outcomes must not be overlooked. Recent evidence has identified a positive correlation between enhanced patient outcomes and higher education nursing. According to (Kane, Shamiyian, Mueller, Duval, & Wilt, 2008), an increase of one B.S. in Nursing (BSN) prepared nurse per patient day was associated with decreased odds of hospital acquired pneumonia, unplanned extubation, respiratory failure, and cardiac arrests in Intensive Care Unit (ICU) settings.

Research Question: Do the benefits of higher education requirements for registered nurses outweigh the current shortage of nursing professionals in the health care field?

Conceptual Framework:

This model supports the implementation of higher education standards for nurses as a means to promote positive change in the health care sector. Registered nurses provide direct care to patients and significantly impact the quality of care received. Treatment received by nurses with a BSN or equivalent has resulted in 10% drop in mortality rates, 6% decline in failure to rescue rates, and shorter length of stay by approximately 2% (O'Brien, Knowlton, & Whichello, 2018).

Methods: A computerized search of the literature was conducted utilizing Academic Search Complete, Complementary Index, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Health Literature (CINAHL), Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition and Ovid Medline. Various terms and term combinations were utilized; the following key words or phrases were used: nursing shortage, shortage of nurses, aging population and shortage of nurses, impact of aging population on nursing shortage, higher education nursing, BSN outcomes, advantages of higher educated nurses, clinical outcomes of BSN nurses.

Inclusion Criteria: Studies reviewed in this literature analysis were limited to peer-reviewed articles published from 2008-2018. Evaluated articles were written in English, had availability for viewing full-text versions and were found in nursing or medical journals. Furthermore, sources reviewed concentrated on national or global nursing shortages, nursing outcomes in relation to nurse education and the effects of an aging population on the nursing workforce.

Exclusion Criteria: Articles reviewing clinical outcomes in comparison to nursing education of certified nursing assistants (CNAs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs) were not evaluated in this literature analysis.

Results & Discussions: The Institute of Medicine (IOM), along with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, joined together to combat the national nursing shortage crisis. It is their belief that higher nursing education requirements will not reduce the nursing shortage; rather, to counteract this issue, they recommend the implementation of nursing residency programs for new graduate nurses (Zinn, Guglielmi, Davis, & Moses, 2012).

As experienced nurses leave the workforce, new graduate nurses replace their role in the health care industry. On average, it takes a new graduate nurse approximately one full year to become proficient at independently performing nursing care (Zinn, Guglielmi, Davis, & Moses, 2012).

Nurse residency programs provide new graduate nurses with the tools, resources, and the support necessary for incoming nurses to develop quality bedside care, reduce medical errors and prevent nursing fatigue or burnout.

As this literature review has analyzed, advanced training of nursing personnel had a positive correlation with improved patient outcomes. By implementing nursing residency programs for all new graduating nurses, patient outcomes may significantly improve while simultaneously preventing future nurses to be deterred from entering the nursing profession due to strenuous education requirements.

Nursing Implications: As the largest group of care providers, nurses are responsible for providing various levels of nursing care. With the continuously evolving role of nursing, advanced training is essential to provide quality and competent patient care. In order for nursing residency programs to be successful in improving patient outcomes and reducing the nursing shortage, support of currently practicing nurses will be fundamental to the success of this initiative. Furthermore, nurse residency programs will pose significant challenges for hospital leaders. Not only will hospitals be required to create a nursing residency curriculum, but they will also require support from nurse leaders to train new graduate nurses.