
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background and significance of research problem

Continuing education, the so called CE, is one means for ensuring that members of the nursing profession maintain their competence to practice. At time of rapid progress and development in medical science and technology, CE is increasingly important in the health care profession (Kristjanson, 1992).

There are many dimensions of increasing pressure which professional nurses have to face today. One major pressure involves the demands placed on the nurses' role that flow with rapid technological improvements coupled with concomitant changes in medical practice (Yuen, 1991, p. 1233). What might have been adequate preparation for the practice of nursing a few years ago is not sufficient for today. Nursing education within the practice settings is becoming increasingly complex. Nurses are required to develop further knowledge and skills on an ongoing basis to reflect the latest development within the field of nursing. At the same time, they also need to maintain or develop further clinical expertise related to proper management for the particular patient under their care.

The relationships between societal and technological

changes and subsequent pressures for reforming on health care systems and nursing practice have been described by McFarlane (1981). This confirms that nurses face constantly increasing demands to remain both professionally up-to-date and personally capable of coping with the stress of nursing and changes in their own lives. The knowledge of nurses must be broadened in order to keep pace with the development of science and technology and changes of health care delivery system. It is a basic contention that nurses need constant access to appropriate forms of further education as an important mechanism for coping with these changes.

In China, the continuing education for nurses is the responsibility of both the Continuing Education Division of the Nursing School and the Staff Development Division of the hospital. The working groups of these two divisions have been conducting both formal and informal CE programs for both physicians and nurses. However, most of the programs are provided for physicians. CE program for nurses are very limited, and most of them are unplanned.

Higher nursing education in China was reestablished in 1983 after having stopped for 30 years. All the nurses who graduated before 1983 had only attended the secondary nursing school. In the secondary nursing school, the nursing curriculum was only three years consisting of two years for lectures and one year for clinical practice. Many subjects

such as psychology, pedagogy, sociology, communication skills, nursing research, nursing management and leadership, nursing education, and nursing theory were not included in the curriculum. Therefore, the knowledge-based for those nurses is insufficient to make them feel confident to perform their roles and responsibilities in today practice. At present, even though thirteen medical universities in China have built the faculties of nursing for educating the student nurses at the baccalaureate level, the number of the graduates is limited to 16-20 per year for each university. Therefore, the total number of graduates with B.S.N. is only about 200 per year in China. After graduation, these graduates will be assigned to work in hospitals throughout China. Some subjects benefit to nursing profession are still not included in the curriculum of baccalaureate level, and the duration for practice both in certificate and baccalaureate levels are limited. Thus most of nurses in clinical settings are lack of sufficient knowledge and skills to give the patients a quality of care and feel insecure to supervise the nursing students for clinical practice. To facilitate these responsibilities and maintain their clinical/technical competence, nurses need ongoing educational experience. Having the constraints of most practice settings, it is a challenge to study the needs for CE among nurses who need to be competent or have a particular need for, or interested in, developing further expertise in

specific clinical areas related to their nursing practice. Hospital administrators and nursing educators have responsibilities to provide some opportunities for nurses to attend CE program.

China Medical University, located in Shenyang city, Liaoning Province of China, has three teaching hospitals with approximately 2,000 beds and 1,322 nurses. The teaching hospitals are responsible for clients in all ages with all kinds of health problems. The condition of patients hospitalized in the teaching hospitals is more serious than others. Since these teaching hospitals are affiliated with China Medical University and are responsible for both the medical and nursing students who practice in clinical settings, nurses working in these teaching hospitals have to teach the nursing students from the secondary nursing school affiliated with China Medical University and nursing students from the Faculty of Nursing in China Medical University. So the nurses in the teaching hospitals have greater responsibilities than those who work in other hospitals in Shenyang. However, the nurses in these teaching hospitals have somewhat limited knowledge and skills to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively because of insufficient basic educational preparations and no adequate CE program for them.

The Faculty of Nursing in China Medical University provided a CE program for the nurses in three teaching

hospitals of China Medical university a few years ago. The curriculum of this CE program, however, is not based on the nurses' needs but borrows from medicine. So the nurses still do not increase either their appropriate knowledge or develop the skill needed in their daily role performance.

In the development of any continuing education program curriculum, performing a learning needs assessment is the first step (Homes, 1989). Assessing learning needs is a comprehensive and complex process. It is both an initial and the most crucial step in planning a nurse CE program. Need assessment not only identifies the education areas needed to expand the nurses' knowledge-based in order to improve their performances but also provides information needed for program development (Almquist, 1990). Therefore, as educators, we should identify the nurses' needs first in order to design appropriate CE programs for them.

Continuing education needs have been studied extensively in western countries, mostly in the United States, which emphasis on individual choice. In China, however, only two studies were conducted for assessing the CE needs of nurses. One was conducted by Hong Shun and her colleagues in 1994 aiming to explore the current state of continuing education of nurses and obstacles they met in receiving continuing education in Jilin province of China. They also identified several pathways of renewal knowledge most nurses

preferred (Hong Shun, et al., 1994). Another one was also conducted in 1994 by Junlan Liu and Ling Wang. They identified knowledge that nurses working in nine hospitals in Beijing city of China preferred to learn in CE programs (Junlan Liu & Ling Wang, 1994). Although these two studies have explored the CE needs of nurses in some parts of China, no detailed knowledge content were posted by nurses in these studies. Therefore, the researcher of this study is interested in conducting this descriptive study to assess the needs for CE among nurses in three teaching hospitals of China Medical University in order to provide some information for hospital administrators and nurse educators to design continuing education programs and curriculum more effectively and efficiently.

Objectives of the study

The study has three main objectives:

1. To identify the continuing education needs among nurses working in three teaching hospitals of China Medical University.
2. To determine the continuing education needs among nurses working in different clinical units.
3. To determine the continuing education needs among nurses with different years of clinical experience in nursing field.

Assumption

The nurses working in clinical settings regardless of units and years of experience need continuing education.

Limitation

Since data collection was only from three hospitals in Shenyang, the results could not be generalized to nurses working in other hospitals in China.

Significance of the study

The continuing education need assessment will provide some information/evidence for hospital administrators and nurse educators to design appropriate continuing education programs in China. This will maximize resources, improve nurses' knowledge and skills, create some changes to improve patient care, and meet the needs of nurses working in three teaching hospitals of China Medical University. The result of this needs assessment will be one of the strategies that moves toward the goal of maintaining and improving the health of the public.

Definition of Terms

Continuing Education is viewed as planned learning experiences provided by both the Continuing Education Division in Nursing Schools and the Staff Development Division of hospitals in terms of formal training programs following basic nursing education. The purpose of CE in nursing is to built upon various educational and experiential bases for the enhancement of practice, education, administration, research, and theory development for the goal of maintaining and improving the health of the public.

Nurse's Continuing Education Needs is professional caregiver's desire, interest, while working, to gain more knowledge and skill through CE program in order to be able to function efficiently in the changing world and to achieve high level of role performance. These needs will be assessed by Nurse's CE Needs Inventory developed by the researcher.

Nurses are those who graduated from various nursing schools and now working in three teaching hospitals affiliated with China Medical University regardless of position and responsibilities.

Years of Clinical Experience is the working ability gained with duration of clinical practice in nursing field regardless of positions and responsibilities.