

20TH WORLD NURSING EDUCATION CONFERENCE

May 22- 24, 2017 Osaka, Japan

Current challenges suggest innovations in perioperative entry to specialty education

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Unlike undergraduate nursing education, learning in nursing specialties occurs primarily via on the job training. An exploration of how nurses enter perioperative nursing practice has the potential to uncover assumptions about how the knowledge and skills are necessary for practice should be acquired, and the role of perioperative nurses during this time. Current models of becoming a perioperative nurse are without a formal agreed entry pathway and are locally embodied expressions of ontologic, epistemic and axiologic structures. Despite being highly-specialised, there is no prerequisite education for entering the specialty. Because the goal of the undergraduate nursing degree is to prepare a generalist nurse, the novice must acquire the knowledge base and skills to perform as a perioperative nurse separately. This can only be achieved through employment in the specialty, so many operating theatres offer institution specific programs and on the job training.

Conceptualisations of learning in the complex operating room workplace are largely relegated to skills-based tasks and competencies alone. There has been little research surrounding how pedagogies of entry to practice in perioperative nursing can innovate to address growing challenges in perioperative nursing. The entry to practice of perioperative nurses is a socially important issue, with more than 50% of hospital admissions for surgery and the successful conduct of surgery depending upon skilled nurses, of whom there is a global shortage. Solutions to educational concerns within the specialty need to consider the impact that pedagogy has on current and future challenges. Nursing education must innovate and collaborate in order to focus on the uniqueness of the perioperative nursing role, both within nursing and the related disciplines of surgery and anaesthesia, in promoting safe and high quality care.

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