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## Nursing students' perceptions of the clinical learning environment

Nora Flynn<sup>1</sup> and Frances Finn<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>University Hospital Waterford, Ireland<sup>2</sup>Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland

**Introduction:** In Ireland, nursing students spend 50% of the undergraduate programme in the clinical learning environment. The quality of the clinical learning environment has significant influences on students' learning. Yet, there is a dearth of research on the clinical learning environment from an Irish context. To ensure that graduates are fit for purpose and the delivery of safe patient care, it is imperative that the model for clinical learning is evidence-based. Students' perceptions of the learning environment influence both their approaches to learning and their preferences for future employment. The aim of this study is to investigate nursing students' perceptions of the clinical learning environment in acute hospitals in the south east of Ireland.

**Method:** A cross-sectional survey design was undertaken utilizing a well-established questionnaire with a convenience sample of undergraduate BSc general nursing students (n=132).

**Results:** Students were found to be very satisfied with the clinical learning environment. Students' high level of satisfaction was found to be in relation to the clinical nurse manager, the clinical placement coordinator, learning opportunities, nursing care, the ward atmosphere and the supervisory relationship with the preceptor. Learning opportunities were found to be the most important factor to contribute to learning, with the shortage of staff being the greatest impediment. Allocation of a named preceptor was perceived to be a key factor in enhancing learning. A positive ward atmosphere where students felt welcomed and supported by staff was important to students. Clinical learning was seen to be further enhanced in environments with organizational cultures of learning.

**Conclusion:** To protect student learning, it is critical that measures to address the shortage of staff continue. In challenging times, this study found evidence of staff commitment to student learning; and of students' motivation to learn across diverse clinical learning environments.

nora.flynn1@hse.ie

**Notes:**