

Current Trends in Nursing and Care: Status of the Profession

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The nursing profession continues to evolve and progress at a meteoric pace. The current trends in nursing and care are multi-factorial including: the increase in the aging population, a transition to informatics, a nursing shortage, and an overarching emphasis on specific frameworks for the guiding of nursing practice, including integration of evidence based practice.

It is estimated that 26% of the United States (U.S.) population are "Baby Boomers" [1]. As the "Baby Boomer" population ages, so does the increase in aging adults with complex health issues. Nurses today must be more adept than ever at caring for the aging adult while the healthcare environment struggles to accommodate this rapidly increasing population.

In addition to an increasing aging population, another trend is the increase reliance on informatics. The incorporation of technology into the healthcare arena may be a challenge for many nurses. The inclusion of the digital medical record has assisted facilities in providing for a more streamlined, accessible, and accurate health history. There also continues to be variation among facilities in the initiation of informatics leading to a lack of consistency from facility to facility. However, it is important to recognize that not all nursing professionals possess the necessary computer literacy skills needed for proficiency in understanding and utilizing informatics, especially those nurses that have been in the nursing profession for quite some time. This leads to consideration of the fact that many nurses are retiring without the numbers to replace them.

The current nursing shortage is impacted by the high number of nurses that are of retirement age coupled with the lower number of new nursing graduates. Contributing to the nursing shortage is the current nurse faculty shortage. A shortage in those nurses with advanced degrees and the ability or willingness to enter academia affects the ability of institutions of higher learning to educate more nursing

students. In 2010, nursing schools denied admission to over 75,000 potential students due to a lack of adequate nursing faculty [2], without new graduates to replace retiring nurses, the burden of providing patient-centered care rests on the shoulders of those left at the bed-side. A nursing shortage then contributes to nurse fatigue and burnout, the potential for medical errors and compromised patient safety, and poor patient outcomes.

In terms of patient outcomes, the nursing profession has seen an increased emphasis on integration of evidence-based practice. The incorporation of best practices into nursing care has contributed to the individual nurse claiming more ownership in the achievement of positive health outcomes for patients. Nurses are now responsible for being a direct line in the conducting, reporting, and implementation of research. Most importantly, this responsibility has led to a paradigm shift in the way nursing is viewed. No longer is nursing viewed as task oriented discipline content on taking orders within the medical hierarchy. Nursing can now be considered a science; contributing to the research and discovery of new and innovative approaches to improving health outcomes.

As nursing continues to evolve, so does the current healthcare environment. Affected by a multitude of factors, nursing will forever be in a constant state of flux. Trends can be both negative and positive. Whether it is the changing face of the populations for which nursing cares for, a rapidly changing technological environment, nurse/faculty shortages, or an emphasis on evidence based research, nursing is up to the challenge and will forge ahead with vigor and accountability.

References

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