

Training Needs of Psychiatric Nursing Staff in Acute Wards. An Empirical Study in the Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki, Greece

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Abstract

A study was carried out to identify the training needs of psychiatric nursing staff working in acute wards. Which type of learning, which training needs and how want the training to be delivered. Qualification and accreditation were also examined. Questionnaires were given to 70 nurses working in the 5 acute wards of Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki, Greece. The key findings were that most participants wanted to be trained in practical nursing skills in every day practice. The most preferable training thematic was: a) Management of violent and aggressive behavior, b) Risk assessment, c) The suicidal patient, d) Clinical assessment skills, e) The patient with psychosis and f) Communication skills. Accreditation was very important and they wanted to gain professional qualification. The empirical study highlighted the need for further training, in the frames of Continuing Education. The findings

could be of great interest for The National Center of Public Administration, as useful informative material, according to the real training needs of the specific group.

Key words: Acute wards, Psychiatric nursing, Training needs

Introduction

Psychiatric acute wards are specific segments for caring mentally ill adults. Psychiatric urgent refers to “an acute disturbance of thought, mood, behavior or social relations that requires direct confrontation” (Allen 2002).

Nursing staff in acute psychiatric wards usually has to take care of violent, aggressive and possibly suicidal patients (Eaton, 2000).

Continuing nursing education according to American Nurses Association (ANA) refers to educational activities that provide knowledge, aiming at the improvement of provided services (Pena & Castillo, 2006). Dickerson (2000) defines continuing nursing education as a continuous process of knowledge and skills acquisition, a part of the initial education, aiming at the professional growth.

The need for the training of psychiatric nursing staff became perceptible very early (1854) in Scotland, where the first system of education of Psychiatric Nurses was established. The specific system also enacted certificates of special knowledge in 1891 (Roussou, 1993).

A research in Winchester in G. Britain regarding the educational needs of nursing personnel, in acute segments, revealed in general the personnel’s intense wish to undertake an educational program for dealing with acute incidents. The 71% declared that wanted training in 3 main thematic axes: a) Management of violence and aggression, b) Psychological treatments and interventions and c) Communication skills (Clinton *et al*, 2001).

Doyle *et al.* (2003) studied the 2 day training program concerning the risk assessment. All of the participants (100%) declared that the training had positive effects on every day practice even after 1 year of the seminar.

Research concerning the training needs of nursing staff in acute wards in G. Britain, indicated that the personnel asked training specifically on issues suitable to every day practice. Main thematic was: Risk assessment, working with people with personality disorders, management of violence and aggression, psychosocial interventions, working with people with dual diagnosis (drugs and alcohol) and people with psychosis. The preferred method of training delivery was short (1-2 h) practical teaching sessions (Jones, 2003). Clarke (2004) revealed the lack of training programs according to real educational needs of staff in acute segments.

According to Gournay (2005) four thematic are recognized as most important for staff: Family intervention, Medication management, Patients with dual diagnosis and Cognitive and behavioural therapy.

A national survey of training needs assessment in Ireland highlighted the need for further education in: a) Risk assessment, b) Management of violence and aggression, c) The suicidal patient, c) Legal issues and mental illness, and d) Communication skills (Brennan, 2006). Most recent study suggested interprofessional training on: a) Management of violence and aggression and b) Patients with personality disorders (Mason *et al*, 2008).

Aims

The purpose of this study was to investigate the training needs of nursing staff in acute wards in the Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki, Greece.

The issue of training needs assessment in the specific sample has been of no interest research in Greece until now. Such study has never been conducted in Greece before, so the authors, apart from the main research tried to review the literature systematically in order to approach the subject in detail.

The main purpose was defined in the following 3 research questions: a) Which type of learning is more appropriate according to their opinion, their Grade and which training needs they prefer, b) How do they want the training to be delivered and c) What qualifications and accreditation do they want to gain from their training.

Method

Population

The total population working in the 5 acute clinics of the Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki was 70 nurses. In total 70 nurses participated in the study, all working in acute inpatient acute psychiatric settings. 60% (42) were women (Female) and 40% (28) were men (Male). 34 of them (F=22, M=12) were qualified mental health nurses (49%) and 36 (F=20, M=16) were nurse assistants (51%).

According to their Grade (total years of employment) was the following:

Grade A: ≥ 10 years (36%) 25 persons (M=9, F=16)

Grade B: 3 – 9 years (27%) 19 persons (M=10, F=9)

Grade C: ≤ 2 years (37%) 26 persons (M=9, F=17)

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used for collecting data. The authors were granted official permission to adapt Dr's Jones (Senior Research Fellow, City University, London) questionnaire for the needs of this empirical study. The questionnaire consisted of 23 multiple choice questions, either demanding only one response or more than one responses, on four main areas: a) demographic information, b) the preferred type of learning (new knowledge, knowledge update, practical nursing skills) and most important training needs, c) the preferred method of training delivery (short courses, teaching seminars, practical teaching sessions) and d) the type of accreditation or qualification (How important is to gain accreditation and what type of qualification).

Participants were also given an accompanying letter explaining the purpose of the study. Responses were anonymous.

Before given, the questionnaire was piloted to four qualified mental health nurses. Pilot study revealed that questions were explicit and no further clarifications were needed. Of the 70 questionnaires given, 70 were returned giving a response rate of 100%.

Results

The findings were based on the three research questions: preferred type of learning and training needs; method of training delivery; what short of accreditation or qualification do they want.

Type of learning and training needs

Participants were asked what they would like to gain from training. They were given three specific types and were asked to choose with order, starting from the most important

according to their opinion: a) New knowledge, b) Knowledge update and c) Training in practical nursing skills. The type of learning most useful to psychiatric nursing staff according to their opinion was the following: Practical nursing skills was the type identified as most important (40%) 28 persons, knowledge update ranked second (37%) 26 persons, new knowledge was referred as third choice (23%) 16 persons, (Table 1)

Both men and women as first choice mentioned practical nursing skills (F=16, M=12). There is a difference in responses between men and women concerning the type of knowledge update (F=17, M=9). This may reflect the fact that women tend to be educated mainly in theoretical areas. New knowledge came up as third choice for both men and women with small difference (F=9, M=7).

Table 1 Type of learning most useful according to their opinion

Type of learning most useful	According to their opinion					
	Nurses		F		M	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
New knowledge	16	23	9	21,43	7	25,00
Knowledge update	26	37	17	40,48	9	32,14
Practical nursing skills	28	40	16	38,10	12	42,86
Total	70	100	42	100	28	100

An interesting finding was that nurses with fewer years in job highlighted practical nursing skills as most useful in every day practice, while those with more previous experience identified knowledge update as more important (Table 2).

Table 2 Type of learning most useful according to their Grade (total years of employment)

Type of learning most useful	Total years of employment (Grade)					
	Grade A (≥10 years)		Grade B (3–9 years)		Grade C (≤ 2 years)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
New knowledge	7	28	4	21,05	5	19,23
Knowledge update	12	48	6	31,58	8	30,77
Practical nursing skills	6	24	9	47,37	13	50
Total	25	100	19	100	26	100

The training needs considered to be the most important for nursing staff are presented in Table 3. Participants were asked to choose 6 from 13 main thematic axes referred to training needs. The management of violent and aggressive behavior was the first essential thematic training for acute inpatient settings. Risk assessment ranked second as a training issue. Suicidal patient care was another essential in training. Other training needs included assessment skills, psychotic patient and communication skills. While examining the results it can be seen that men (23 responses) saw as important the management of violence and aggression with some difference according to the other five choices they follow. Women's responses weren't of much divergence as there were small differences between their preferred training needs.

Table 3 Training needs of psychiatric nursing staff in acute wards

Training needs	Responses		F Responses		M Responses	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Management of violence and aggression	56	23,43	33	22,60	23	24,73
Risk assessment	44	18,41	28	19,18	16	17,20
Suicidal patient	38	15,90	26	17,81	12	12,90
Assessment skills	35	14,64	19	13,01	16	17,20
Psychotic patient	34	14,23	22	15,07	12	12,90
Communication skills	32	13,39	18	12,33	14	15,05
Total	239	100	146	100	93	100

Preferred method of training delivery

When asked about the preferred method of training delivery (79%), 51 persons, stated practical teaching sessions (6 – 10 h), (F=33, M=18).

More specifically, in order to gain new knowledge 42% (30 responses), (F=16, M=14) of total sample identified practical teaching sessions as more appropriate method. For updating knowledge 36 respondents (F=22, M=14) (52%) stated practical teaching sessions too. Additionally 64% of the participants (45 responses), (F=28, M=17) chose the same method for training in practical nursing skills.

Accreditation – Qualification

Gaining accreditation or extra qualification from a training program found out to be of great importance for the participants. 37 responses, (F=26, M=11) (53%) highlighted the importance of accreditation, in order to reflect the value of training, knowledge and skills obtained by nurses.

A large proportion of the respondents (49%) (34 responses), (F=23, M=14) wanted a training program that would provide them with a professional qualification title, recognized by employers and other organizations.

Discussion

This empiric study revealed that staff working in acute segments in Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki Greece, are required to undertake training programs related to every day practice.

This was reflected in the majority of the responses in which staff chose issues on practical nursing skills. From the responses it seemed clear that staff was interested in attending programs in core components on acute nursing care.

The main training axes were referred to: Management of violence and aggression; risk assessment; the suicidal and psychotic patient; assessment skills and communication skills in order to become better in every day practice.

The need for further training in management of violent and aggressive behavior was also highlighted in same studies (Jones & Lowe, 2003. Brennan, 2006. Mason *et al*, 2008) as one of the main training field.

Another interesting finding was that staff wanted the training to be delivered in practical teaching sessions. That specific method of training delivery allow adult learners to participate energetically in their learning and provide easier knowledge (Rogers, 1999).

From the study also resulted a lack of correlation between training and career as only 4% stated that was interested in improving curriculum vitae. This might be owed to the fact

that career is still related to the number of years in work and not so much to qualifications. This fact might suggest further study.

Study limitations

One important limitation was the fact that such study is attempted in Greece for the first time. Consequently the originality of this empiric study lies in the fact that will provide a data base on the specific field, giving stimuli for further study.

The present study was limited in the Psychiatric Hospital. So another limitation was that nursing staff working in psychiatric clinics of General Hospitals didn't have the opportunity to participate. Researcher's professional obligations and the timetable of the study were the main reasons imposing this restriction. Their participation would give the most completed picture for the educational needs of the particular target group.

Conclusion

Adult acute mental health inpatient wards should provide structured activity and specialized therapeutic care for service users. This empiric study showed that psychiatric nursing staff working in acute inpatient settings is highly motivated to be further educated and improve every day practice. Course content should be of relevance to acute inpatient nursing, flexible in delivery and method. Specific areas of training were identified: management of violent and aggressive behavior, risk assessment, the suicidal and psychotic patient, assessment and communication skills. Overall, the participants demanded a practice based program integrating theory into every day practice.

In conclusion, a continuous procedure of training needs assessment is needed in order for nurse to be of value for service users and begin to implement therapeutic approaches through training and practice development.

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