

# STUDENT SUPPORT ON CLINICAL PLACEMENT

*'The influence of the preceptor on the quality of the clinical learning environment and level of support for student nurses over the three-year undergraduate nursing programme and its effect on the student nurses' learning and preparation for becoming a competent registered nurse'*



## Introduction

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Nursing is a practice-based profession; therefore education delivered on clinical placement is the most highly valued component of undergraduate nursing programmes (Vallant & Neville, 2006). Much of the education provided on placement is through preceptorship, where students are paired with registered nurses (preceptors), with the aim of assisting the student in developing “knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for practice as a registered nurse” (Nursing Council NZ, 2007, p.29). It is this relationship between student and preceptor that is pivotal in providing students with a supportive learning environment. Characteristics of the clinical learning environment are multifaceted however, and despite clinical education being important, there are several barriers to the successful application of provision on clinical placement, which can lead students to feel unsupported and questioning their readiness to become competent registered nurses (Levett-Jones, Courtney-Pratt, Harbrow & Rossiter, 2015).

## Clinical Learning Environment

Evidence shows that students experience a positive learning environment when:

- Preceptors are willing to share their knowledge, skills and professional insights with the student
- Preceptors actively involve students in all learning opportunities within the clinical setting
- Preceptors are approachable, supportive and exhibit a positive attitude towards the student (Levett-Jones, Lathlean, Higgins & McMillan, 2009; Vallant & Neville, 2006).

Evidence shows that students experience a negative learning environment when:

- They are paired with more than one preceptor during their placement, limiting the preceptor's ability to develop a trusting relationship with the student and restricting their ability to allow the student autonomy to practice
- Preceptors exhibit a negative attitude towards the student
- Preceptors are too busy to adequately explain procedures and interventions, leading to learning opportunities being lost (Courtney-Pratt, Fitzgerald, Ford, Marden & Marlow, 2012; Vallant & Neville, 2006).

Literature also emphasizes that preceptors face their own challenges when preceptoring students. Such challenges include a lack of education and preparation for the preceptorship role and time constraints due to heavy workloads and staff shortages, which consequently influences the level of support provided to the student (Emanuel & Pryce-Miller, 2013).

## Recommendations

- ❖ Ensure the continuity of preceptors for student nurses over the course of their placement
- ❖ Assign the preceptor with lighter patient workloads
- ❖ Improve preceptor selection and training

## Implications for Practice/Conclusion

The level of support provided on clinical placement can make or break the clinical experience for students. Those who receive high levels of support capitalize on the learning opportunities it brings thus, developing competence and confidence. Those who receive minimal support, lack confidence, exhibit high levels of stress and question their competency and preparation for graduation (Levett-Jones et al., 2009). By ensuring the continuity of preceptors, assigning the preceptor lighter workloads and improving preceptor selection and training, the quality of the learning environment and the level of support, can be improved for student nurses now and in the future.

## References

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## **PICOT Model**

By utilising the PICOT model (Schneider, Whitehead, Lo-Biondo-Wood & Haber, 2013) the research problem 'are nursing students adequately supported on clinical placement and what effect will this have on their learning and preparation for becoming competent registered nurses', is further developed into a more concise research question: 'the influence of the preceptor on the quality of the clinical learning environment and level of support for student nurses over the three-year undergraduate nursing programme and its effect on the student nurses learning and preparation for becoming a competent registered nurse'.

PICOT Category	Information relating to question	Justification
Population	Student nurses	I identified student nurses as the population group as this is the group that are undertaking tertiary education to become registered nurses
Intervention	Preceptorship	I have identified the preceptor as the focus of this literature review as various studies have shown that they play a pivotal role in influencing both the quality of the clinical learning environment and level of support for student nurses
Comparison	Negative and positive learning environments	Although the focus of this literature review is not of comparison, I have included it in this literature review as the clinical learning environment is directly impacted by the level of support the preceptor provides
Outcome	The outcome will provide answers to how the quality of the clinical learning environment and level of support impacts the students' preparation on becoming competent registered nurses	I want to find out how the quality of the clinical learning environment and level of support impacts on our preparation for becoming registered nurses
Time	Three years	This is the timeframe of most undergraduate nursing programmes

## **Rationale**

I chose to present the clinical issue 'are nursing students adequately supported on clinical placement and what affect will this have on their learning and preparation', in the format of a poster as posters are a good way of visually illustrating the issue by firstly capturing the readers' attention and then conveying to them the intended message (Rowe & Ilic, 2009). Rowe and Ilic (2009) state that posters elicit a degree of active learning in which the audience must engage with the poster so to read and analyse the information that is presented.

By illustrating the clinical issue of student support in a poster format, I hope to target not only the nursing school educators and management of the hospital, but the charge nurses and ward staff as well. Posters provide personal interaction and are a conversation starter, thus by presenting my clinical issues as a poster and placing it where everyone can view it, I hope to start discussion amongst them on how they could proactively work together to implement the recommendations I have provided so to improve the quality of the clinical learning environment and the level of support provided to the student nurse

## **References**

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