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Balancing academia with clinical proficiency in the training of nurses at university degree level: The case of Ghana

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Countries worldwide are encouraging the transition of nursing education from hospital based training in colleges to a University degree level. At the University level, the preparation of student nurses involves acquisition of theoretical knowledge and clinical practice, which if well done can serve as double edged sword for blending theory and practice. We explored the ability, roles and experiences of nurse academics in balancing theory and practice in training nurses. Using an exploratory research with methodical triangulation design, data were collected from nursing lecturers and student nurses using individual interviews with questionnaires and focus group discussions with FGD guide. Findings show that clinical practice is recognized by both lecturers and students as an important measure for enhancing theoretical preparation of nursing students to make them fully qualified and proficient in the delivery of nursing care. The majority of nursing lecturers had short duration of clinical exposure of two to three years before joining academia. Although nursing lecturers recognize the importance of clinical proficiency in training nurses at the degree level, the university academic calendar does not favor the inclusion of clinical practice in their academic programs, making balancing academic work with clinical practice difficult. Some findings were congruent with other studies elsewhere while dissimilarities were also established among Ghanaian nurse educators on their unwillingness to endeavor to blend theory with practice. Although nurse educators in academia are obligated to blend theory and practice in training nurses, challenges are encountered that militate against the attainment of this objective. University curriculum for nursing education should be designed to place priority on clinical practice. Ghanaian universities must therefore give autonomy to the schools of nursing in designing the academic calendar. The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Ghana should put monitoring mechanisms in place to ensure clinical practice competencies of university nursing lecturers.



Source: Authors' construct, 2015: *Nursing training program at the university level should prepare students to become competent practitioners, knowledgeable professionals and seasoned researchers*

Biography

Lily Yarney is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Public Administration and Health Services Management at the University of Ghana Business School, with specialty in Social Science and Public Health. Before joining academia in 2013, Lily had worked with three international non-governmental organizations as the focal person for HIV/AIDS programming and research. She has published quite several research articles in recognized peer reviewed journals, and continues to conduct research in public health and health services management

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