

# PSYCHIATRIC CLINICAL PLACEMENT UPON NURSING STUDENTS PERCEIVED KNOWLEDGE IN CARING FOR MENTALLY ILL

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**Background:** The implementation of a psychiatric clinical placement has been an integral component in Indonesia Nursing Academies.

**Purpose:** The research was to investigate how nursing students' perceived knowledge in caring for mentally ill patients as a result of their psychiatric clinical placement.

**Method:** A descriptive survey design commonly called non-experimental design was used in this research. Students, who had completed two weeks in a psychiatric clinical placement as a component of mental health nursing subject, were invited to participate. Then, a questionnaire was distributed to nursing students (N=40), giving an overall responses rate of 85 %.

**Result:** The finding revealed that as a result of clinical placement, the majority of nursing students had better perceived knowledge regarding the concept of mental health and mental illness, nursing care plan, medication and providing education towards patient and people in community about mental health.

**Conclusion:** The findings provide evidence for the benefits of such a clinical placement in relation to students' perceived knowledge in caring for psychiatric patients.

**Key words:** Clinical placement, nursing students, knowledge, mentally ill

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## **Introduction**

It is not compulsory for nursing students in some states of western countries to undertake a psychiatric clinical placement; however, nursing academy students in Indonesia must undertake a psychiatric clinical placement. The Ministry of Health in Jakarta prescribes a nursing curriculum for all Indonesian Nursing Academies. Nursing academy students must undertake mental health nursing in fifth semester as a core subject, which consists of both theory and clinical placement. The theory is provided in a classroom over thirty-two hours, then students have to undertake clinical placement for two weeks in an allocated psychiatric hospital. The objective of this clinical placement is to prepare students for their future profession working with mentally ill patients in a psychiatric hospital.

The implementation of a psychiatric clinical placement has been an integral component of Indonesian nursing academy curricula, since the movement of nursing education from Nursing Senior High Schools to Nursing Academies in 2000. Clinical placement provides students with the opportunity to apply theory to clinical practice in a psychiatric hospital setting. It has been acknowledged in the nursing education literature that the application of theoretical knowledge must be transferred into clinical practice (Munnukka, Linnainmaa & Pukuri, 2002). Theory provides information that assists nursing students to develop an understanding of the nurse's roles and the patients' needs in the clinical setting. Thus theory can inform practice, but theory alone does not provide the opportunity and reinforcement of clinical practice. Clinical placement, on the other hand, provides information that helps nursing students to implement nursing actions in a clinical setting. Consequently, nursing theory can be applied and further understood with clinical placement.

Mental health nursing involves interaction between humans, particularly the nurse and patient; because of this humanistic perspective, it is not enough to learn theory only. It is necessary for students to experience mental health clinical practice first hand and with real patients. With the opportunity of a psychiatric clinical placement, students implement knowledge such as therapeutic communication and relationship building with psychiatric patients during their clinical placement. Communication skills need to be applied into the real practice with patients (Arthur, 1999). This is important because students are able to assess the needs of patients and demonstrate a caring behavior. Secker, Pidd and Parham, (1999) have suggested that

communication skills increase competency in the care of psychiatric patients and assist to develop therapeutic relationships with patients. Therefore, a psychiatric clinical placement is an important component of mental health nursing in Indonesian Nursing Academies.

## **Methods**

A descriptive survey design was used in the study. It is defined as exploring the existence of variables both independent and dependent, then utilising the data to identify and examine current conditions and practices (Beanland, Schneider, Wood & Haber, 1999). Such designs are also utilised to describe the relationship among variables (DePoy & Gitlin, 1994). The purpose of this type of design is to describe the relationship between independent and dependent variables in order to answer the research questions proposed for the study.

The study utilised a one group post-test design only. A group of participants was surveyed after a psychiatric clinical placement of two weeks. The clinical placement was allocated by the Purwokerto Nursing Program Study according to the normal timetable of the nursing curriculum in the mental health-nursing subject. The purpose of the post-test was to evaluate the effect of independent variable psychiatric clinical placement upon dependent variable nursing students' perceived knowledge, attitudes and confidence in caring for psychiatric patients and to justify whether or not clinical placement made a difference.

### *Data Collection and Data Analysis*

The researcher collected data using a questionnaire adapted from the literature utilising existing survey instruments (Bell, et al, 1998; Maude, et al, 2001). Permission was obtained to use any survey questions from an existing questionnaire. Although, the questionnaire is an appropriate way to collect data within a descriptive study design with a large-scale population (Beanland et al, 1999), there is no way of ensuring whether or not the participants are telling the truth. However, the researcher believes that the usage of the questionnaire offered certain advantages in this study: it was less expensive, required a limited time allocation and covered a large population.

Nursing students enrolled at the Purwokerto Nursing Program Study who had completed a psychiatric clinical placement as a component of a mental health-nursing subject in the fifth semester, were invited to participate in the study. Clinical placement was undertaken for two

weeks in a psychiatric hospital setting where psychiatric patients receive care and treatment. All participants in the study were third year nursing students in the Purwokerto Nursing Program Study. The data were collected from a convenience sample of 40 nursing students after their completed clinical placement in psychiatric hospital. The questionnaire was distributed to 40 nursing students. The questionnaires was being return, giving a responses rate of 84%. Students were provided with a printed copy of a plain language statement.

Ethical consideration was complied in this study to maintain subjects' right. The subjects gave written informed consent and anonymous data were collected. The researchers keep confidentiality of the data.

### Results

The percentage of females who participated in the study was more than males and was 64.7 % and 35.3 % respectively. The research results found that clinical placement, 83.9% of the nursing students had a better knowledge regarding the concept of mental health and mental illness, developing a nursing care plan, medications and providing education towards patients and people in the community (Table 2).

*Table 1 Nursing Students' Perceived Knowledge of Psychiatric Patients*

Items	Response (%)				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I have a better knowledge of the underlying causes of mental illness.	32	66	2	0	0
2. I have a better knowledge of the differences between mental health and mental illness.	32	66	2	0	0
3. I have a greater knowledge of the needs of psychiatric patients.	22.7	61.9	15.4	0	0
4. I could identify the difference in a patient's clinical presentation between depression and unhappiness.	24.7	66	9.3	0	0

Information about the concept of mental health and mental illness was sought from the first to fourth question. The underlying causes of mental illness become the first question and the second question explored the knowledge of differences between mental health and mental

illness. Both two questions had responses with 32 % strongly agree and 66 % agree. Similarly, 61.9 per cent of students did agree to the third question about the needs of psychiatric patients. Students also felt they were able to identify the difference in a patient’s clinical presentation between depression and unhappiness as the fourth question, accounting for 24.7 % strongly agree and 66 % agree (Table 2).

*Table 2 Nursing Students’ Perceived Knowledge of Psychiatric Patients*

Items	Response (%)				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5. I have a better knowledge of how to conduct a mental status examination.	24.7	66	9.3	0	0
6. I have a better knowledge of how to develop a nursing care plan.	25.8	68	6.2	0	0

Questions number 5 and 6 were related to understanding of developing a nursing care plan. Question concerning conducting a mental status examination and developing a nursing care plan were asked to assess nursing students’ perceived knowledge of nursing care planning. A greater proportion (66 %) did agree that as a result of clinical placement, students had a better knowledge of how to conduct a mental status examination. Moreover, most participants were of the view that they were more able to develop a nursing care plan post a clinical placement (93.8%, see Table 3).

Assessment of students’ perceived knowledge of psychiatric medication involved eight questions (question 7-14). They did agree that they had a good perceived knowledge of anti depressant medications and their side effects, accounting for 68% and 71.1% respectively. A further 79.4% of students could perceive a better knowledge of anti-psychotic medications and their side effects. Although 70.1% of students did agree with perceived knowledge of anti-anxiety medication and their side effects, 3.2% of students disagreed. Most students considered that they had a better knowledge of mood stabilizing medications (68%) and their side effects (62.9 %), only 6.2% of students who disagreed.

Table 3 Nursing Students' Perceived Knowledge of Psychiatric Patients

Items	Response (%)				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7. I have a better knowledge of anti depressant medications.	14.4	68	16.5	1.1	0
8. I have a better knowledge of anti depressant medication side effects.	14.4	71.1	12.4	2.1	0
9. I have a better knowledge of anti-psychotic medications.	12.3	67	19.6	1	0
10. I have a better knowledge of anti-psychotic medication side effects.	10.3	69.1	19.6	1	0
11. I have a better knowledge of anti-anxiety medications.	10.3	70.1	17.5	2.1	0
12. I have a better knowledge of anti-anxiety medication side effects.	8.2	70.1	20.6	1.1	0
13. I have a better knowledge of mood stabilizing medications.	9.3	68	20.6	2.1	0
14. I have a better knowledge of mood stabilizing medication side effects.	9.3	62.9	23.7	4.1	0

Table 4 Nursing Students' Perceived Knowledge of Psychiatric Patients

Items	Response (%)				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
15. I am able to provide clients with education regarding the effects of medications.	9.3	75.2	15.5	0	0
16. I am able to provide clients with education regarding the side effects of medications.	11.3	67	19.6	2.1	0

Two questions (15-16) related to providing patients with education regarding the effects of medications and their side effects, most students held views that they were more able to provide education on the effects of medication (84.5%) and the side effects of medications (78.3%). However, 2.1% of participants disagreed with being able to provide education regarding the side effects of medications.

Table 5 Nursing Students' Perceived Knowledge of Psychiatric Patients

Items	Response (%)				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
17. I know how to assist psychiatric patients to develop living skills.	13.4	72.2	12.2	2.2	0
18. I know how to educate people in the community about mental health issues.	10.3	75.3	14.4	2.1	1.1
19. I am able to provide information and education for patients regarding their diagnosis.	12.4	64.9	17.5	3.1	2.1

The remaining three questions (17-19) of dependent variable nursing students' perceived knowledge, a great majority of students (85.6%) held the view that they understood how to assist patients to develop living skills and how to educate people in the community about mental health issues (85.6%). However, a small percentage of students disagreed with perceived knowledge of assisting patients to develop living skills and educating people in the community, accounting for 2.2% and 3.2% respectively. Although the majority of students (77.3%) agreed that they were more able to provide information and education for patients regarding their diagnosis, 5.2% of students did not agree.

### Discussion

A study by Martin & Happell (2001) found that students who felt a lack of knowledge related to psychiatric nursing, were not interested in caring for patients in a clinical setting. Students believed that their limitations would benefit neither themselves nor the patients. Martin & Happell (2001) were disputed by Granskar et al, (2001) who suggested that through clinical learning, nursing students gained the opportunity to obtain a better knowledge of dealing with the patients' needs. For example, the students could assess patients' needs by putting theoretical knowledge of therapeutic communication skills into practice with the patients, thereby gaining knowledge in assisting the patients, and building up their familiarity with therapeutic communication in the psychiatric setting.

In addition, this study strongly supports the view that as a result of a psychiatric clinical placement, students had better perceived knowledge of psychiatric patients. The responses of the majority of students (98%) indicated that they held positive views in relation to the underlying

causes of mental illness and the differences between mental health and mental illness. Although a small percentage of students (5.2 %) stated that they did not know how to assist patients to develop living skills, 80.4 per cent of them agreed with the statement. Further, agreement was expressed by 80,7 % of students that they were more able to conduct a mental status examination and by 93.8 % students who felt more able to develop a nursing care plan. Thus, these findings are supported by previous studies in which students gained good perceived knowledge of psychiatric patients post clinical placement (McLaughlin, 1997; Granskar et al, 2001; Munnukka et al, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

The findings from the present study are important to support continuing a psychiatric clinical placement in Indonesian Nursing Academies. They may also assist the Ministry of Health in decision about maintaining a clinical placement in a psychiatric setting and reviewing current clinical practice. Thus, the findings provide evidence for the benefits of such a clinical placement in relation to students' perceived knowledge in caring for psychiatric patients.

The following results addressed for each of the research questions. First, there was no a significant finding in relation to the demographic characteristics of nursing students in this study; Second, the majority of nursing students had better perceived knowledge of psychiatric patients following their clinical placement; Therefore, the findings of present students are supported by previous studies in which students had better perceived knowledge of psychiatric patients, in caring for the patients following their clinical placement (Munnukka et al, 2002; Granskar et al, 2001; Bell et al, 1998).

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