

TITLE: Exploring facilitators and barriers to nurses' uptake of postgraduate education in Australia

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BACKGROUND

Nursing education is designed to prepare competent nurses to meet the current and future healthcare needs of society. Nurses require advanced education to increase their ability to influence patient care positively (Cotterill-Walker, 2012), deliver optimal care (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2013) and improve patient outcomes (Girof & Albarran, 2012). Therefore, it is important to understand registered nurses' attitudes towards postgraduate education. To advance the profession and provide excellent patient care, barriers that hinder nurses from undertaking advanced education should be identified and then properly addressed. Identifying the facilitators that influence nurses to advance their education will help healthcare organisations and healthcare educators to develop programs that will promote an environment that supports education advancement.

AIM

The primary aim of this research was to explore registered nurses' attitudes towards postgraduate education in Australia.

METHODS

This research followed a sequential mixed-methods approach design that included development of an instrument (questionnaire- Nurses Attitudes towards Postgraduate Education [NATPGE]), an online survey and telephone interviews. Phase One comprised a survey, the Nurses' Attitudes Towards Postgraduate Education (NATPGE) instrument developed for this research, which was given to a sample of registered nurses in Australia to explore the barriers to and facilitators of postgraduate specialty education. Phase Two comprised an interpretative study, which took a translational research approach in which qualitative data were collected through telephone interviews with registered nurses to contextualise the Phase One survey findings.

The planned and deliberate synthesis of the findings, through discussion, from these two phases has direct implication to postgraduate education for specialty practice in Australia.

RESULTS

Phase One (survey) was the final stage of the instrument development that used data-reduction techniques and the results of the survey showing the nurses' attitudes towards postgraduate education. Principal Component Analysis was performed on all 14 NATPGE items. Accounting for 52.5% of the variance of the scale, the analysis identified a three-factor solution for 14 items: 'facilitators'; 'barriers'; and 'professional recognition'. Qualitative analysis of the data from Phase Two, the interpretative study, showed three broad conceptualisations of registered nurses' attitudes towards postgraduate education: 'facilitators'; 'barriers' and 'professional recognition'.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the factors that affect registered nurses' attitudes towards postgraduate education will help educators identify areas for change to attract registered nurses to pursue postgraduate education. The overall results from this research provide a composite understanding of the facilitators of and barriers to postgraduate education for Australian nurses.

TOTAL WORD: 394

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