

CHALLENGES IN NURSING EDUCATION-PRESENT & POST COVID 19 ERA

Dr. R. Sudha¹ & Dr. S. Ani Grace Kalaimathi²

Abstract

The global pandemic COVID 19 has brought an everlasting effect on the educational sector. The schools, higher education institutions and the universities were shut down as a measure to contain the spread of COVID 19. This pandemic leads to the transformation of the age-old chalk-talk method to technology-driven online teaching. For the vast majority of the teachers and young learners, online education during this COVID 19 is the first experience. COVID imposed threat to nursing education creates a lot of demands on the future health workforce. Overcoming the challenges posed in the theoretical and clinical learning of the students in acquiring core nursing competencies is the need of the hour. E-learning is the only promising solution available in the current situation and it can be very effective. E-learning is a blessing in the disguise. Google classroom and classes on Zoom, Face book live, Instagram chat, WhatsApp, Google meet, youtube and Skype are widely used by the students and teachers in the current scenario. Simulation and telehealth are used for clinical learning of students. Nursing faculty should maintain their role as an educator during the crisis and enhance the entry to practice competencies by the students.

Key Words: Nursing Education, Covid 19, Online Education, E-Learning, Clinical learning, Nurse educators, Health workforce

Introduction

The global pandemic COVID 19 has brought an everlasting effect on the educational sector which critically impacted the country's growth. The schools, higher education institutions and the universities were shut down as a measure to contain the spread of COVID 19. The opening of these institutions in the near future is uncertain. Higher education is the key determinant of the economic future of the country which is disrupted significantly in COVID pandemic (Choudhary, R, 2020). According to the UNESCO report, 1.26 billion children

¹ Professor Cum Principal, VHS-M.A. Chidambaram College of Nursing, Adyar, Chennai-113

² Registrar, Tamilnadu Nurses and Midwives Council, Chennai

comprising of 72% of the world's student population was affected by educational institution closures. India contains over 320 million of these learners. (Praveen Sudevan, 2020).

The Statistics by UNESCO as on 28.06.2020 shows that 1,072,375,222 learners were affected which comprises of 61.2% of total enrolled learners from 114 countrywide closures. This pandemic leads to the transformation of the age-old chalk-talk method to technology-driven online teaching. For the vast majority of the teachers and young learners, online education during this COVID 19 is the first experience. Nursing education, one of the respected and trustable professions worldwide, is not an exception. COVID-19, an ongoing crisis of the present and the future, teaches us a real-time lesson in equality, commitment, leadership, social justice, social welfare, ethics, and patient care. This pandemic will forever shift the educational landscape (Dewart, G., Corcoran, L, Thirsk, L. & Petrovic, K., 2020)

COVID imposed threat to nursing education creates a lot of demands on the future health workforce by the temporary halting of the entrance of the new graduates into the health care system. Overcoming the challenges posed in the theoretical and clinical learning of the students in acquiring core nursing competencies is the need of the hour.

The acute nurse shortage of the current and the future

In the battle against COVID 19, India marches forward with the help of medical and nursing personnel who are at the forefront. India has only 1.7 nurses per 1000 population as against the WHO norm of 3 per 1000 population, which is 43% lesser than the needed. The Govt has informed in the Rajya Sabha on March 3, 2020, that India has 3.07 million registered nursing personnel (Chaithanya, M, 2020). Even pre-COVID era, the shortage of health workers is significant, in specific nurses and midwives accounts for 50% of the current shortage in the health workforce. The world will require an additional 9 million nurses and midwives by the year 2030 if all countries to achieve the SDG 3 on health and wellbeing (WHO, 2020).

Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (2020) stated that "High quality Nursing education is an essential service during COVID19 health crisis". The famous adage says when health sneezes economy sneezes. This can be modified as when health sneezes education also sneezes. But when health sneezes, education of health care providers especially the nursing education should be the remedy. In COVID 19, there is a great and urgent demand for front line health care workers, especially the nurses.

Nurses are risking their lives to save the lives of many in the struggle against COVID19. The services of the retired nurses are exploited and nursing students are graduating into a highly

challenging environment. It is also noted that other nurses are changing their speciality and equip themselves to provide respiratory care by undertaking newer learning. Tim Morris, a former nurse and the Director for Clinical Solutions at Elsevier has stated that third year students are assigned to provide clinical support for patients with COVID. He further stated that it is frightening for student nurses moving from a classroom environment to a ward environment and one cannot completely understand what emotional turmoil each one of them could experience (Ian Evans, 2020).

E-learning, a sustainable solution for Nursing Education in COVID 19

Nurses have chosen nursing as their career with a desire to serve mankind. While bedside nurses are in the war foot, the nurse educators busy preparing the students online. E-learning is the only promising solution available in the current situation and it can be very effective. E-learning is a blessing in the disguise. Nevertheless, India, too, is experiencing an E-learning boom. Google classroom and classes on Zoom, Face book live, Instagram chat, WhatsApp, Google meet, youtube and Skype are widely used by the students and teachers in the current scenario. Simulation and telehealth are used for clinical learning of students.

Canadian Association for Schools of Nursing position statement declared to maintain high quality nursing education and there should not be a delay in the graduation of the nursing students considering the urgent health care needs. Nursing faculty should maintain their role as an educator during the crisis and enhance the entry to practice competencies by the students by adopting creative methods and appropriate supervision. This position statement not only reflects the need for nursing education in Canada it echoes the same in world countries.

Challenges in E-learning

Within the health field, the colleges and schools of nursing are facing unique challenges in the preparation of the next-generation workforce.

Accessibility: The first and foremost problem is the stark digital divide among Indian students. The Household Social Consumption on Education in India report on 2017-18 reported that the Rural households having a computer at home was only 4.4% whereas the Urban household having a computer at home was 23.4%. Rural Indian households having Internet was less than 15% as opposed to 42% urban Indian households. The poorest households cannot afford a smartphone or a computer (Praveen Sudevan, 2020). Though May 11, 2020 is celebrated as the National Technology day, it is still not affordable by the

major population in India. We can understand that these statistics could have been improved over three years, but one can't deny the fact of stark digital divide among urban Vs rural and Rich Vs Poor.

Acceptance and Transformation: Students will be missing the collaborative learning experiences in the online mode as the in-person classes are replaced by online classes. They also miss co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, collaborative learning, community living in the hostel. This is a disadvantage for the final year students as they start behaving as a matured student, lead all the activities in the colleges and try to excel in everything they do. They have determination, the goal for their future which propels them to groom and prepare themselves for their future career and are very much influenced by the peer group. Online education could not compensate these losses of the students.

Clinical learning: Once pandemic is announced, the students were abruptly removed from the clinical area as the learner safety was at the forefront. There exist challenges in the clinical learning of nursing students. Not all procedures are taught in the laboratory. Though various mannequins and simulators are utilized to train the students, it can never compensate for the hands-on experience on the patients. Even if the colleges are reopening, students posting in the wards is jeopardy without Personal Protective Equipment. The budget constraints may not allow the use of PPE by the students. COVID 19 has disturbed the routine in hospitals. The hospitals once multi-speciality in nature are modified as COVID special hospitals. In the hospitals, where all specialities are functioning, the patient admission to various specialities has drastically comedown. Only emergency surgeries are performed. The reporting and OPD visit of people with chronic illnesses has reduced significantly since people are at home and the fear of contracting the infection prevented them from seeking medical service. The private health care sectors which play a major role in the health care services of the public now have limited their areas of service because of the scarcity of the resources. At this crucial juncture, the provision of a variety of clinical experience is a challenge. The question arises on how to maintain the core value of nursing and how to facilitate the learning of students without compromising the clinical learning of students.

There is a significant percentage of fresh graduates trying to establish and keep their feet firmly on their initial success in their workplaces who as novice nurses face a lot of challenges, undergo stresses in the system. They need additional support and supervision in this COVID crisis. When nursing students work under these novice nurses, there is a potential danger of placing themselves, patients and other health care workers at further risk.

Faculty expertise: Teaching Gen Z students online by the Generation X & Y faculty is a great challenge. These students have been seeing the technology since their birth, are surrounded by it which is the part of their life. But it is not the case in nurse educators as they have seen this technology evolving as they grow old and mature. Technology and the use of gadgets is something they are forced to learn as and when the demand arises. Many of these faculty members depend on the younger generation for learning related to technology at the workplace and home. Handling gadgets, online teaching, presentation, examination and evaluation requires unique skills. Faculty should learn to troubleshoot the technology which is a challenge for many.

Economic Resources: Online education can't be a short gap arrangement during the crisis. For its continued use, a lot of input in terms of money is required. Developing virtual simulation, online games, purchase of high-fidelity simulators needs huge investment by the organization. Institutions fear to make such an investment at the time of economic crises.

Ethical Challenges: There is a need to ethically consider weighting the benefit of education against the risk and strain of the learner personally and professionally. The academic institutions' concern about the risk to the student and the student's willingness to take the risk matters a lot. Academic programs are the need of the hour which will provide a workforce with further skills and knowledge to combat the pandemic. The needs of the public should be outweighed with the need of the students. There may come a time where fast tracking programs need to be conducted to train the students with little foundational knowledge to provide nursing care during the pandemic. Such fast-tracking programs are occurring internationally. An ethical dilemma arises whether reducing the practicum to allow for the accelerated program is justifiable (Dewart, G., Corcoran, L, Thirsk, L. & Petrovic K, 2020).

Navigation of the new normal

Nursing education includes theoretical learning and practicum. As like any other courses of higher education, theoretical classes are taken in the classroom. The skill learning part of nursing is something unique which requires the students of nursing to practice in the skill laboratory before practising on the patients in the hospital. Professional courses aim to prepare the candidates for independent practice with autonomy. Courses like medical, dental, nursing etc require to spend the prescribed hours with the patient to learn the clinical component of those particular courses. Theoretical learning in association with the skill

learning makes a nursing student perfect who upon completion will be able to practice successfully on the patients.

The new normal requires the faculty members to adopt either fully online or blended mode of education. The role of the instructor can range from active to a small presence online to none. Students can be expected to listen or read, complete problems or answer questions, explore resources and collaborate with peers. The feedback system can be either automated or by the faculty. Asynchronous or synchronous online communication can be used. The pedagogy used can be expository which goes beyond just giving information, exploratory which requires the students to explore and learn, Collaborative demands the interaction among students and with the faculty members (Barabara Means, Marianne Bakia& Murphy R, 2014).

In the online medium, flexibility is one of the desirable characteristics expected from the faculty members. Nurses and nurse educators would always wish not to make any mistakes. It is not as easy as we think. Students need clinical alternatives to enhance their learning. The class alternative should be the one accessible, feasible, compassionate and rigorous and based on the needs. Teachers have the responsibility to help students manage their fears and expectations in digital learning as online learning environment lead to change in the norms, relationships, learning styles and pattern.

Focusing on final year students: Final year is the time of reflection, achievement, excitement and anticipation and they are mere 6 months away from completing their course and embarking on a new career in one of the most respected professions. Educationally, students might have mounting pressure related to the completion of their course requirements, examination and course completion, obtaining a degree and graduating on time and transitioning into an overwhelmed and exhausted workforce. Besides they may have worries related to health, finances and their future. The concerns for the nurse educators are related to the completion of clinical hours by the students when they can no longer go to the hospital, students having facilities like internet services and computer at home to attend virtual classes(Brunworth, J., 2020).

Chu Feng, M. et al (2020) recommended six strategies for nurses in their study on exploring stress and psychological distress. This can be applied for the nursing students when they face the stress of working in the ward. They are caring, supporting, inquiring, informing, equipping and assisting. Caring includes the psychological assessment of students and

initiating measures as per assessment; Supporting includes creating a friendly atmosphere and promoting team spirit where caring and sharing takes place; Inquiring includes listening to their problems and concerns and assessing their challenges and limitations based on the experiences with them; Informing includes providing relevant, transparent, time to time information on prevention of infection, clinical performance, risks and challenges in working with the particular patient/area, informing family the necessary information as and when required; Equipping involves training students and faculty supervisors to enhance their knowledge and skill on infection prevention and the area-specific knowledge and skill and Assisting involves establishing a strategy for support by the family, professionals and significant others in reducing the stress and worries of the nursing students.

The graduating class of students need vigorous training and greater preparation to enter the health care system in the current scenario. This can be augmented by helping students practice the necessary skills using simulation techniques, practising on mannequins, learning from video demonstrations of essential skills and conducting Objective Structured Clinical Examination. It requires robust inputs in terms of money, material, time and human resources. Pooling and sharing of resources will be helpful in this crisis as many of the educational institutions can't afford to make huge investments when they are unable to pay for their employees. It is the responsibility of all concerned to ensure the smooth transition of the graduating class of students into the nursing workforce, a significant challenge we must overcome. Protecting the nursing students and nursing graduates is of at most important as their limited practice experience should not be a threat for themselves and others too. Problem Based Learning (PBL), Team-based Learning, Case scenario, Small group meetings with the students in an online platform will be helpful. It required the nurse educators to be innovative, explorative, flexible, nimble and agile. Faculty are expected to redefine their teaching methodologies, approaches and evaluation methods. Morin, K.H. (2020) stated that many institutions have moved to pass/fail system instead of letter grading.

Success story by the Tamilnadu Nurses and Midwives Council

The Tamilnadu Nurses and Midwives Council, one of the premier nursing council in South East Asia has set a role model by its educational activities during COVID 19 crisis. It has not less than 180 Colleges of Nursing and 200 Schools of Nursing under its umbrella in the State of Tamilnadu, India offering various nursing programs such as Auxillary Nursing & Midwife, Diploma in General Nursing & Midwifery, B.Sc(N), Post Basic B.Sc(N) & M.Sc(N). Once the lockdown is announced, when the nursing educational institutions are closed, the

Registrar of the Nursing Council facilitated the continuity of Nursing education for the students by initiating classes through Google Class Room(GCR). For B.Sc(N), institutions were pooled based on the student strength under one GCR mentor, likewise, 55 GCR mentors were selected. One overall coordinator and subject coordinators were assigned. Meanwhile, senior nurse educators who volunteered to be a resource person pooled under the subject coordinators and were assigned for the preparation of PPTs for units in various subjects based on the syllabus. A time table was prepared for all four years and was shared for all GCR mentors along with the PPTs to be posted in the GCR by the coordinator. The GCR mentor has posted the PPTs daily as per the time table and maintained the attendance of the students. After completion of the theory portions, now the OSCE steps of procedure is posted for various subjects. Similar techniques were adopted for all programs and are successful.

Conclusion

Massive nursing manpower has been invested in the fight against COVID 19 which needs to be strengthened before it progresses to depletion. As nurse educators and nursing professionals, we have more questions than answers. By disclosing those concerns, we can come out with collective actions and fruitful efforts. The International Year of the Nurse and Midwives has seen the profession cast into the public limelight in an even more distinct way than usual because of the pandemic which offers a better future for nurses. Though COVID-19 has created a negative impact on daily life, in the world of education, there is a ray of hope to be found. Educators from across the world need to think outside the box to sustain education. The Gen Z students i.e. the future young nurses will be equipped to handle the crisis, as well as COVID19 very effectively. The young ones are adaptable, tech-savvy and above all want to help themselves and others. Even after the pandemic, traditional learning and online learning should go hand in hand for the benefit of learners and e-learning should be a part of a new normal life. In this time of crisis, capacity-building of young minds should be the goal of nurse educators which will enable the nursing students to develop the employability skills, increase productivity, and enjoy optimum health, and well-being in the decades to come, and ensure the overall progress of India. As said by the UN Deputy Secretary-General, it is a time to invest in education's power to transform. If nurses aren't who else? We can succeed in the transformation.

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