Effects of Postgraduate Education on Nursing and Reflections in the Clinic Field : A Qualitative Research

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Abstract

Background: Nurses improve themselves with various trainings according to the developing era and patient needs. Determining the effects of postgraduate education in the clinical field opens new horizons for improving the quality of patient care.

Aim: To determine the opinions of the participants about the effects of postgraduate education in nursing and the reflection of these effects on the clinic field and patient care by the nurse specialist.

Methods: This is a phenomenological descriptive qualitative study which was data gathered through in-depth interviews with nurses, physicians, and patients. For content analysis, the data were subjected to thematic analysis.

Results: The data obtained from the views of the participants about the effects of postgraduate education in nursing and its reflections on the clinic were combined under 4 main themes and 20 sub-codes.

Conclusions: It was concluded that postgraduate education has effects on nursing roles, individual development, other professional development, increasing its professional value and scientific power, and these effects are reflected positively in clinical field.

Keywords: Nursing, Postgraduate education, Nurse Specialists, Qualitative research.

Introduction

Education is the most significant resource for nurses to maintain their effectiveness in the health care system and to contribute to professional and individual development. Postgraduate education is particularly important for increasing and supporting the individual and professional power of nurses[5]. The increase in the individual and psychological power of nurses directly affects their professional power[8]. Nurses desire for individual development, organizational support and nursing competencies and communication skills need to be developed[16].

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Postgraduate education provides many benefits like increasing income level and quality of life, providing many options when choosing a job, priority, employment opportunities, prestigious status, and effective solutions for the progress of country, etc. The individual benefits of postgraduate education include increasing self-confidence and autonomy, increasing critical thinking skills, being more successful at interpersonal relations, being open to development and learning, job satisfaction, and ensuring continuous development[4].According to the American Nurses Association (ANA), nurses can achieve higher education and training levels thanks to graduate education that supports their academic progress after graduation[2]. Nurses who have master's and doctorate degrees gain a deep professional knowledge of their field, can reflect their expertise in their attitudes and skills, adopt an evidence-based approach in nursing practice, have advanced critical thinking skills, can conduct research from the beginning to end and publish this research, and produce scientific solutions to current professional problems[6].

Nurses are experts who aim to increase the quality of care in the clinical field by making evidence-based practices, who can achieve these goals, who are expected to have a high level of knowledge and skills, and who aim to implement professional philosophy and practices[16].

The increase in the number of nurses who are experts in the clinical field directly contributes to the strengthening of the nursing profession. If practicing nurses can reflect their gains in the clinical field, a significant increase in the quality of nursing services will be achieved.

Methods

The aim was to determine the views of the participants on the effects of postgraduate education in nursing and the reflection of these effects on the clinical field. This is a phenomenological qualitative study based on exploration. The research was carried out with 19 specialist nurses, 13 physicians working with the same nurses, and 13 patients receiving care from the same nurses. In terms of the reliability and validity of the research results, it was important to include these three groups, who are affected by the reflection of postgraduate education in the clinical field. This technique is known as the data-driven triangulation technique in literature. In the sample selection to provide maximum diversity, postgraduate nurses of different ages and working years, specializing in different nursing fields, working in different units, nurses with doctoral students or nurses who completed their doctorate were included in the study.

The data for the study was collected between July and December 2021 with face-to-face individual interviews. Before the interview, informed consent was obtained from the participants. The interview was terminated when data saturation was reached.

The research was carried out using a Nurse Information Form, Physician Information Form, Patient Information Form and Semi-structured Interview Questionnaires prepared for each participant group (nurse, physician, patient).

Coding was done according to the Miles-Huberman model. The Miles-Huberman model combines the data collected in qualitative research into common categories, reduces the number of codes and visualizes them[10]. The MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 software was used to support the process. The initial number of codes generated was 2235. Data were grouped under 4 main themes and 20 sub-themes (Table 1). The opinions of all participants were taken into consideration, no one was excluded.

Findings

Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants

Specialist Nurses: The average age was 35.37±1.3 years (min: 26, max: 43). Years of employment as a nurse were 13.32±1.3 on average (min: 3 max: 22). The average working time as a nurse specialist was 6.63±0.9 years (min: 1 max: 17). Physicians: The average duration of working with a nurse specialist was 3.46±0.4 years (min:1 max: 6). Patients: The mean hospital stay was 13.3±2.9 days (min: 3 max: 30).

Effects of Postgraduate Education in Nursing and Reflections in the Clinic - Themes

The data obtained from the views of the participants about the effects of postgraduate education on nursing and its reflections in the clinic

were collected under 4 main themes and 20 sub-codes (Table 1).

Table 1: Effects of Postgraduate Education in Nursing– Themes and Codes

THEMES	CODES
Effect on Professional Empowerment	• Effect on professional image • Effect on scientific power • Effect on increasing the value of the profession
Effect on Nursing Roles	• Therapeutic and nursing role • Educator role • Manager role • Researcher role • Autonomous and responsibility using • Counselor role • Decision maker role • Patient rights advocacy role
Effect on the Individual Development of Nurses	• Self-knowledge • Communication skills • Self-confidence • Increase in respect and reliability • Resilience and patience
Other Professional Effects	• Professionalization • Getting promoted • Financial contribution • Job satisfaction

THEME 1: Effect on Professional Empowerment

This theme was grouped under 3 sub-codes: the effect on professional image, the effect on scientific power and the effect of increasing the value of the profession (Table 1).

Participants stated that postgraduate education positively affected the professional image of nursing and provided an increase in professional prestige and reliability.

"It positively affects the perception of nursing in society. Because the approach of these nurses to patients is more professional and helpful. We trust them" (Physician 10)

"Educated people are better. When you are conscious and educated, it is always more professional to be close to the patient, to take care of them, to use the tools and to know the drugs." (Patient4)

Participants stated that graduate education positively affected the professional knowledge, attitudes and skills of nurses and deepened their perspectives. Thus, they stated that significant contributions were made to the scientific knowledge of nursing and the scientific power of the profession.

"When you learn science, you are already mature. The more you know your profession, the more mature you become. If you read more, learn more, your profession will not be just a job for you, it will turn into a field where you reflect your knowledge. … That's why it is necessary to do a job not only as a job, but also to do science. This is what happens when you get a graduate degree in nursing. You are not only commuting to work, but you are also adding science to it, you are adding knowledge. Postgraduate education increases both the professional and individual development of nurses and increases the quality of their work." (Physician4)

THEME 2: Effect on Nursing Roles

This theme is under the title of the effect of postgraduate education on advance nursing roles. It included 8 sub-codes of effect on the therapeutic and nursing role, effect on the educator role, effect on the manager role, effect on the researcher role, effect on the role of being autonomous and responsible, effect on the counselor role, effect on the decision maker role and effect on the patient rights advocacy role (Table 1).

Participants stated that practitioner nurses reflect their knowledge and skills in their therapeutic and advanced nursing roles. Particularly, some patients stated that the difference between private branch (stoma care, etc.) nurses was more pronounced.

"It is very beneficial for us that practitioner nurses reflect their knowledge in clinical practices and evaluate patients with a holistic approach." (Physician10)

"Simply, there is a device over there. While none of the nurses had any knowledge about the device, the practitioner nurse came and immediately explained

that this is how it happens, this is how it is used. Of course, it has more detailed extras, but what we see is that they are highly successful in their own field. A special branch nurse specializing in wound care, not a general nurse. I see that they are remarkably successful" (Patient13)

Most of the nurses stated that they continued to do research after completing their graduate education, while some stated that they wanted to do research, they did not have any problems in obtaining research permission from their institutions, but they could not do research due to workload and other reasons.

"There is no opportunity to do research because of the workload." (Nurse6) "The institution allows research that is non-invasive and does not require financial support. But they don't give permission for experimental research, or they say it must use a doctor's name." (Nurse11)

Most of the nurses stated that they carried out innovation studies and developed projects despite all the difficulties in their institutions. In addition, it was observed that the nurses were excited and experienced professional satisfaction while talking about their innovation and project work.

"… patients have a Gomco device that they use to prevent air leakage after thoracic surgery. This device is not available in many wards of the hospital, nor is it in our ward. This is how we solved it. We have developed a negative pressure apparatus system, and it works for patients. I will be developing this apparatus in the future." (Nurse4)

Participants stated that patients and their relatives received effective counseling from practitioner nurses.

"In the role of consultant, they are always sought after, asked questions and referred to…" (Physician 9) . "I benefited from the nurses' training and consultancy. Practitioner nurses do their best for patients." (Patient 7)

THEME 3: Effect on the Individual Development of Nurses

This theme included 5 sub-codes of self-knowledge, communication skills, self-confidence, increase in respect and reliability, and resilience and patience (Table 1).

Nurses stated that master's education, and especially doctoral education, had an impact on self-knowledge and awareness.

"Since I started my PhD, I am thinking differently. Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD. I think that I have become more mature and have different perspectives on each process" (Nurse8)

Participants stated that postgraduate education positively affected the communication skills of nurses, they were able to communicate more easily with practitioner nurses.

"They also communicate professionally with patients and their relatives. But it's not arrogant. They both use their authority and give the patient that confidence." (Physician9)

Participants stated that postgraduate education increased the self-confidence of nurses and they worked confidently.

"Yes, they are more confident, they know how to manage when there is a problem." (Physician11)

THEME 4: Other Professional Effects

This theme contained 4 sub-codes of professionalization, getting promoted, financial contribution, and job satisfaction(Table 1).

"It feels good in terms of job satisfaction. Additionally, getting promotion to support that situation as well. I see the same feeling in my other expert friends. You take the job with all you have you embrace it." (Nurse9)

Discussion

The number of student enrollments in postgraduate education in nursing has increased in the last 10 years all around the world[1]. It was predicted that the number of nurses with a graduate degree working in the clinic would increase in the future[1]. In this study, the average employment period for nurses who completed their postgraduate education in the clinical field was 6.63±0.9 years. The average duration of collaborating with nurses with postgraduate education was 3.46±0.4 years. In addition, when the participant nurses were asked about the reasons for their postgraduate education, they expressed gaining in-depth knowledge in the

field they worked in as the first reason. When all these findings are taken together, the number of specialist nurses working in the clinical field will increase. This foresight is gratifying for the need for specialists who can deliver increasingly complex nursing services with new hospital technology and automation.

Although nursing has a history of 100-150 years, it was accepted as an auxiliary profession until the 1980s and did not receive the respect and acceptance it deserves from society[15]. In this process, the fact that nursing was found to be unimportant or simple and not respected enough by society also had a negative effect on nurses, reducing their commitment to the profession and job satisfaction and causing them to leave the profession[7] .The perceptions of the participants in the study are that postgraduate education positively affects the professional image of nursing, gives the profession prestige and increases reliability. In addition, physicians observed that nurses with postgraduate education have developed professional knowledge, skills, experience, as well as professional attitudes, and patients stated that these nurses were deeply knowledgeable and successful. These findings can be interpreted as showing that postgraduate education positively affects the image of nurses and can prevent them from leaving the profession.

In the study, nurses stated that they reflected their knowledge and skills gained from postgraduate education in their therapeutic and advanced nursing roles. This data is positively supported considering the comments of most physicians and patients. Some of the patient participants stated that they could see the difference between practitioner nurses and other nurses in the care received from special branch nurses(like branch of stoma care…). The mean hospital stay of the participating patients was 13.3±2.9 days. It is thought that this period is sufficient for the patients to understand the difference between specialist nurses. On the other hand, the patients stated with a smile that they were satisfied with all the nurses, that all of them worked devotedly and provided good care. In the literature, as the education level of nurses increases[15], it was stated the quality of nursing care, patient satisfaction and the value of the profession increase. With these findings, it can be concluded that specialist nurses reflect the knowledge, skills and competencies of their specialties in the clinical field and patient care, and this situation positively affects teamwork and patient satisfaction.

The researcher role of nurses includes producing science-based knowledge, which is one of the main goals of postgraduate education. When the participant comments are analyzed, most of the practitioner nurses were very willing to do research in the clinic and continued to do scientific research[3] and projects despite the problems they experienced. Supporting nursing research is within the scope of structural strengthening of nursing.

Participants stated that specialist nurses reflect their managerial skills in the clinic. Studies show that leadership skills and emotional intelligence levels are higher among specialist nurses, and these skills are improved by academic study and education[14].The effective use of management skills by practitioner nurses in the clinical field is consistent with the literature data.

All participating nurses happily stated that postgraduate education had an impact on their individual development. The first and most important of these changes was in the field of communication skills. When the comments of the participants are analyzed, the success of the nurses in communicating with the patients and their relatives, the healthcare team and their colleagues increased, their professional approach was strengthened. Based on these findings, it can be said that postgraduate education influences strengthening the individual characteristics of nurses.

It is remarkable that the first answer given by the participating physicians to the question "How does it make you feel to work with a nurse specialist in the clinic?" was "**Trust**". Physicians stated that they were pleased to work with nurses with postgraduate education, and that this education increased their respect and confidence in the nurses[13]. It can be said that postgraduate education is effective in increasing the prestige and reliability of the nursing profession within the healthcare team. The patients evaluated receiving care from practitioner nurses in terms of service quality and stated that education increased the quality of service. According to McKillop's qualitative study (2012), participating nurses stated

that graduate education increases the level of reliability and respect in the clinic[9].

Decreased job satisfaction and dissatisfaction lead to a decrease in work efficiency, a decrease in workplace commitment, an increase in dismissals, and an increase in medical errors and patient complaints[12]. It is important for nurses to enjoy their profession for their own psychological health, public health, and institutional success[11]. Nurses who want to improve their knowledge by completing postgraduate education are nurses with high job satisfaction who love their jobs[3].Nurses participating in the study stated that postgraduate education caused an increase in their job satisfaction. The education level in nursing is one of the factors affecting job satisfaction. As the education level increases, the job satisfaction of nurses increases[7]. With the data obtained, it can be concluded that postgraduate education strengthens the job satisfaction and job commitment levels of nurses.

Conclusion

In the study, it was concluded that postgraduate education affects advance nursing roles, individual development and professional development, as well as improving the professional image of nursing, increasing its professional value and scientific development. These effects are positively reflected in the clinical field.

In line with these results, suggestions are made to strengthen the nursing profession and to facilitate the reflection of the expertise gained by nurses from postgraduate education and all other effects in the clinical field; to make investments for strengthening nursing and specialist nurses, to promotion and career planning, to research the obstacles to organizational support and produce solutions to eliminate these obstacles.

Limitations

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the patient and the researcher were able to conduct the interviews using a mask covering the face. The facial expressions of the participants, which are valuable in qualitative studies, may not have been fully evaluated.

Informed consent

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