Continuing Education in Nursing

What is continuing education in nursing?
It consists of planned learning experiences beyond a basic nursing educational program. These experiences are designed to promote the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the enhancement of nursing practice, thus improving health care to the public, (Ofosu, 1993).

Why is continuing education necessary for nurses?
Continuing education is necessary for nurses to perform competently, and respond positively to advanced medical, and technological changes in this age of rapid change, and to prevent obsolescence. It is needed to meet the expressed needs or interests of nurses to enable them to provide current and ultimately safe and effective patient care, (Calder, 1986).

Challenges for nurses and continuing education.
1. Nurses are the largest group in the health care system (Lowson, 1986). They are the only group of health care providers required to provide the same level of service in hospitals, seven days per week for 365 days per year (Ofosu, 1993). They work close to the patients and are expected to maintain professional competence and expertise.
2. Advances in medical technology have resulted in people living longer and the need for continuing education is evident for nurses.
3. Nurses are predominately female, and there is ongoing conflict between childbearing and child rearing and the special needs of the nursing profession. The special needs are: responsibility, skills demanded, stress of the work, irregularity of the hours, and consequent intrusions on private life.

What does the research say about continuing education in nursing?
- Nurses graduate from both the college (96%) and university (4%) system. They have different academic backgrounds but perform similar tasks at the bedside.
- the monopoly of degree granting programs for nurses will likely remain in Ontario with the universities.
- Planned joint college/university programs so that the university controls standards of admission, programming, evaluation and graduation, is recommended by educational planners for the year 2000, (Skolnik, 1990).

Factors affecting nurses as women.
(a) Changing patterns in employment of women
70% of female nurses reported to be married and expect to combine marriage and a career. Temporary leave for childbearing and child rearing are expected. The nurses’ return to work can be an easier transition if there are planned educational activities in place, (Ofosu, 1993).
1. **Shifts in age composition (Ofosu, 1993)**
   The proportion of the population aged 65 and over is on the increase. Many nurses need continuing education in geriatric nursing to effectively care for these patients.

2. **Maternal and infant mortality**
   New knowledge and advances in technology have resulted in better means of caring for the prematurely born and high risk infant. Nurses play a significant role in prevention as well as in caring for those at risk. Increased knowledge regarding genetics and new family planning methods suggest the ongoing need for continuing education for nurses.

3. **Population Mobility**
   Since World War II, the migration of many people from one part of the country or the world to another has increased. This population mobility when demonstrated in the health care system results in a high turnover of nurses. The health Care system therefore has been forced to provide orientation, and other forms of continuing education for employees with a variety of education and experiential backgrounds.

**Expectations of the nursing profession**
Under the auspices of the College of Nurses of Ontario, the primary expectation of nurses is the provision of competent nursing care to the public. Some continuing education is provided for nurses by the College and by the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario. The term “Registered” in the title signifies to the public that the individual is qualified and has met the minimum standards of the nursing profession.

**Barriers to nurses’ continuing education**

- 73% of hospital nurses cited shift work as the major barrier to their continuing education. Shift work is a necessary inconvenience for nurses because of the care that the patients require on a 24 hour basis.
- The cost was cited by 50% of nurses as a deterrent to continuing education.
- 18% of the nurses reported having to travel up to one hour by public transportation to be able to participate in continuing educational activities, (Ofosu, 1993).

**Incentives for nurses continuing education**

1. 55% of nurses reported that flexible hours at work was their major incentive for participating in continuing education.
2. Another 55% cited an increase in salary upon completion of a degree as their incentive to participate in university programs.
3. 54% of nurses cited refundable fees upon completion of courses, (Ofosu, 1993).

**Conclusion**
Continuing education is absolutely essential for nurses to provide safe, competent care to patients. It is also necessary to be able to respond positively to advanced medical and technological changes in this age of rapid and constant change as well to prevent professional obsolescence.

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