

# Professional Concerns of Role-Model Nursing Instructors: A Qualitative Research

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## ABSTRACT

### Background

The present study was conducted to perceive the role-model nursing instructors' experience in terms of professional challenges and identification of occupational concerns in the education of nursing students. Nursing instructors have a critical and decisive role in the training of skilled and specialized manpower and subsequent growth and development of the communities. So, the present study was conducted to address the role model nursing instructor's experience in terms of professional challenges of nursing students' education.

### Methods

The present qualitative study was carried out using the inductive thematic analysis method and the objective-based sampling. Data were collected until saturation, using three focus-group discussions (n=22) and two individual interviews with nursing instructors, as well as eight semi-structured face-to-face interviews with role-model instructors from five nursing faculties of the universities in Tehran.

### Results

The three main themes were extracted, indicating the occupational challenges perceived by the instructors as follows: "*Inefficient education-research system*," "*Inappropriate professional position*," and "*Ineffective interpersonal interactions*".

### Conclusion

Regarding the concerns of successful model instructors, professional development, prevention of job dissatisfaction, and implementation of role modeling strategies are recommended to be emphasized. Taken together, reducing the clinical training-associated problems in order to modify the education-research system was recognized as the main professional concern of the role-model nursing instructors.

**KEYWORDS:** Instructor; Iran; Model; Nursing student; Professional

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## INTRODUCTION

Nursing instructors have a critical and decisive role in the training of skilled and specialized manpower and subsequent growth and development of the communities;<sup>1</sup> they are responsible to introduce the professional realities to students.<sup>2</sup> Nursing educators have several concerns, some of which include adaptation with computer technology,<sup>3</sup> students' disabilities,<sup>4</sup> the shortage of nursing instructors,<sup>5</sup> personal concerns, task concerns, impact concerns,<sup>6</sup> time, self-actualization,<sup>7</sup> time constraints, and relationships with administrators, other teachers, other school staff and supervisors.<sup>7,8</sup>

On the other hand, in a study by Safi et al. showing low job satisfaction among the faculty members in incentive, research, economic, administrative, educational and welfare areas, the most and the least important fields were respectively related to motivational and economic areas.<sup>9</sup>

Disch et al. have reported that 97% of nursing faculty members are committed to their profession.<sup>10</sup> In other studies, it has been revealed that effective clinical educators have special attention towards their profession.<sup>11,12</sup>

Nursing educators are not separated from the society and some of their professional concerns must be similar to those of nurses. Hence, we reviewed some studies on professional concerns of clinical nurses which include enhancement of the professional discipline and occupational promotion,<sup>13</sup> improvement of training and continuing education,<sup>14</sup> research and scholarship,<sup>15</sup> and communication between nurses and physicians.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the shortage of nurses, job dissatisfaction, poor social status of nurses, the gap between theory and practice, lack of community-based nursing care, lack of an appropriate student-recruiting system, shortage in the nursing educational curriculums,<sup>17</sup> care-providing manner, clinical performance,<sup>15,16</sup> and provision of a holistic care can be considered as the major challenges of the nursing career.<sup>16</sup>

In a study by Mehdizadeh, organizational expectations of nursing faculty members have been explained in the form of eight categories including the empowerment of faculty members, institutional support, fairness, proper evaluation of the performance, provision of good working conditions, application of appropriate management practices, attention to welfare issues, and financing and promoting the education and research quality.<sup>18</sup>

### *Role Modeling*

The presence of qualified model instructors is essential for the promotion of nursing profession.<sup>2,19,20</sup> Being a qualified model is a sign of instructor's competence for teaching a successful theory and practice,<sup>21-26</sup> and role-modeling is one of the significant strategies in the learning process of nursing students.<sup>27</sup> According to Hossein et al's study in Iran, nursing trainers believe that role-modeling teaching style is the most effective and accurate approach to transfer the experience and professional attitude to students in clinical training.<sup>28</sup>

Since beliefs are motivating principles, stimulating factors and behavior-forming variables,<sup>29</sup> recognizing the professional concerns of the role-model instructors and helping to solve them will result in identification of motivating and stimulating factors in education and further the effective application of role-modeling strategies.

Role model nursing educators had complete understanding of the nursing profession, problems and ways to improve the profession, so understanding their concerns can help the nurse managers, particularly education managers of nursing faculties, to solve educational problems and achieve desired outcomes in nursing education.

Despite the importance of role modeling and the presence of qualified model nursing instructors, there is no study conducted in Iran on the model-nursing instructors' concerns; therefore, the present study aimed to identify the model nursing educators' experiences,

professional challenges, and their concerns in training the nursing students. Moreover, the present study was conducted to address the role model nursing instructor's experience in terms of professional challenges of nursing students' education.

## SUBJECTS AND METHODS

### *Study Design*

In this study, qualitative approach design was used. Qualitative research is an approach in the social sciences which basically relies on the people in their environment and considers the interaction with people in their own language and under the same condition.<sup>30</sup> Since the subject of the study, i.e. role-model teacher concern, had a qualitative phenomenon nature, this study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative researchers do not respond to research questions with a quantitative research methodology.<sup>31</sup> Qualitative researchers have accepted a human-centered and holistic standpoint.<sup>32</sup> There is a world apart from the human senses which is interpreted by people based on their culture, symbols and human interactions, all of which have effects on how they are interpreted and understood. Therefore, inductive thematic analysis was selected as the method of this study and also used for analyzing the obtained data.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method based on the searching themes, representing the subject which has importance in the study question.<sup>33</sup> Themes are a group of codes which express similar concepts. But, judge will show what a theme is. The key role of the theme does not necessarily depend upon quantitative criteria but it is related to the fact that it indicates an important subject about the general research question.<sup>34</sup>

### *Participants and Settings*

Qualitative sampling is not based on probability statistical theories; it is based on the theoretical or purposeful sampling. The samples are usually small and are

studied based on an in-depth method to have comprehensive information of the studied subject.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the participants of this study were selected based on the following criteria:

- 1 The senior undergraduate, master and doctoral nursing students from five nursing faculties of Tehran universities of Medical Sciences.
- 2 Nursing educators who were introduced by students as the role models entered the study.

### *Data Collection*

The researchers followed the participants about the required subjects through introducing repeated questions and helped the participants to express their life experiences. On the other hand, they entered the participants' world using in-depth semi-structured interview and explored their experiences. The three main questions asked included: "*Express your experience in terms of professional challenges in the training of nursing students,*" "*Explain the preventive factors in the promotion of professional nursing,*" and "*Express your experience on role-model instructors or what are your experiences with role model instructors.*" These questions were designed as the interview guide, and participants' answers led the interview process. Exploratory questions such as "*Explain more*" or "*What does it mean?*" and the like were used to encourage the participants to discuss their experiences more and gain access to deeper insights.

The present research was conducted from November 2010 to July 2011. Students were also asked to participate in individual interviews or focus-group discussions, and some were volunteered from each educational level. The volunteers' names and contact numbers were recorded and they were invited for individual interview or focus-group discussion. Data were collected through focus-group discussions and semi-structured face-to-face interviews until saturation. Two sessions of focus-group discussions with last semester undergraduate students and one session with last semester

Master's students were respectively held with 7, 9, and 6 participants. Each session lasted about 80 to 120 minutes, and questions were openly asked regarding the study objectives. Selected individuals participating in focus-group discussion were equal in terms of educational levels. Focus-group discussions helped to provide insights into the sources of complex behaviors and motivations.<sup>36</sup> The sessions were conducted by the researcher and the supervisor using verbal, nonverbal and communication skills. Conversations were recorded by tape recorder and transferred to paper immediately after the session and used in final analysis. Focus groups allowed for interactions between the researcher and the participants and among the participants themselves.<sup>37</sup> Two individual interviews with PhD students and eight nursing instructors were conducted, each lasting about 20 to 120 minutes. Generally, the teachers' questions centered on the state of experiences on professional challenges in nursing education, and preventive factors in professional nursing promotion while the students were asked to express their experiences with the model trainers.

Data collection continued until the basic elements of the study were saturated, i.e. until the participants do not add anything else to the data or what they mention do not conflict with the collected knowledge.<sup>31</sup> Since in this study, no new information was gained from the last three interviews and data saturation was reached, data collection was discontinued after individual interviews and focus-group discussions.

#### *Data Analysis*

Simultaneous collection and analysis of the data was performed according to Braun's point of view in line with the research objectives during six stage: 1. The researcher's familiarization with the data, 2. The generation of the primary codes from the data, 3. Search for finding the themes while reviewing various codes extracted in the previous step, 4. A review over the themes and

re-comparing them with the data to ensure their accuracy, 5. Defining and naming the themes and 6. Preparing the final report.<sup>33</sup>

All the interviews and focus-group discussions were recorded, transcribed and reviewed by the researchers line by line several times so that they could be broken into smallest meaningful units. Following the collection of data, they were coded in MAX-QDA 2007 program, listed and reviewed in order to find the existing similarities in their concept and meaning.

#### *Rigour*

Similar to other qualitative approaches, thematic analysis findings should be as trustworthy as possible and every study must be evaluated in relation to the procedures used to generate the findings.<sup>38</sup> The credibility of the data was established with two PhD candidates of nursing as a peer check. The data were coded and categorized independently by the authors and then the emerged themes were compared. When the authors disagreed, discussions and clarifications continued until a consensus was achieved. In addition, a summary of the interviews was returned to the participants as a member check and it was confirmed that the researcher was representing their ideas.<sup>39,40</sup>

#### *Ethical Considerations*

Students or educators who were not interested in continuing the discussion and/or the interview were excluded from the study. The study was approved by the 40th Research Council and 29<sup>th</sup> Ethics Committee of Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences and the Behavioral Sciences Research Center (BSRC). All the volunteers who agreed to participate in the study signed the informed consent.

## **RESULTS**

Most of the students who participated, with the mean age of  $26.5 \pm 6.25$  years, had a bachelor's degree (55.8%), and 56.7% were female. In



addition, eight nursing instructors with 24±6.7 years of work experience and the average age of 45±2.9 years participated in individual interviews; six of them had a PhD degree in nursing education and two had a Master's degree in nursing.

Three hundred and fifty codes were extracted from the interviews and focus-group discussions. The initial codes were reviewed several times, and the initial themes were identified. The initial themes were compared with the data one more time to ensure their accuracy. Based on the characteristics of each theme, a nature-defining statement was written and conceptual and abstract naming was done afterwards. These themes, therefore, demonstrated the nature and the dimensions of the model instructors' and nursing students' concerns in the education of nursing students. The three main themes extracted, indicating the professional concerns and challenges perceived by the role-model instructors in the training of nursing students, were as follows: a) inefficient education-research system, b) inappropriate professional position, and c) ineffective inter-professional interactions.

Inefficient education-research system was recognized as the most important theme since it was composed of multiple sub-themes, and various strategies would be used by the instructors to overcome this challenge (figure 1).

There are some of the examples of the participants' quotations in each level.

A) Inefficient education-research system

This content is made up of four sub-themes including the "Training management problems," "Clinical education problems," "Negative impact of colleagues," and "Weaknesses in the application of research results in clinical practice".

1. Training management problems: Inappropriate educational planning and incompetent assessment were among the challenges mentioned by the role-model instructors.

- Inappropriate training program includes the unsuitable amount of the considered time for the volume of the course materials. A large volume of the materials in educational planning has been regarded by the instructors

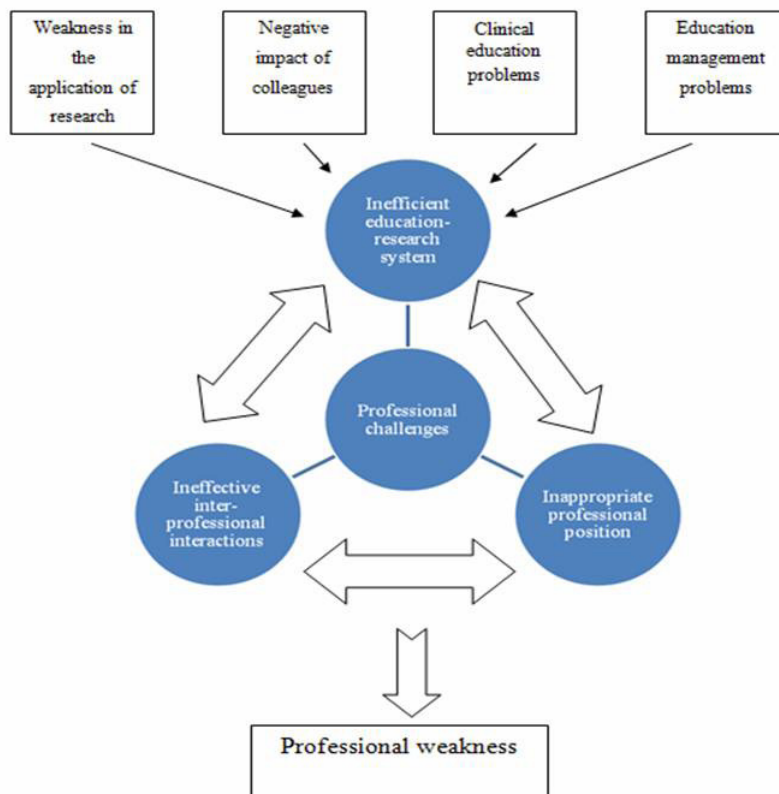


Figure 1: Conceptual map: Professional concerns and challenges

as a barrier to effective learning.

*"All of the educational curricula cannot be covered."* (T3).

*"We are really bombarding the students; for example, for a course with 1.25 credits, you have to put a 500-page book in their mind. Well, how can it be possible? How can such training be effective?"* (T5)

• Incompetent evaluation: Some of the model educators stated that educational administrators are unresponsive to instructors' evaluation; the evaluation is not comprehensive enough either, and the research activities are more concerned than the teaching style.

*"The system administrators don't care about what is happening inside the system; top managers don't care too much about the process. They put more emphasis on the outcomes, whether or not the students are graduated on time, and the likes; no matter how the educators' performance was!"* (Instructor 2)

*"The university put much emphasis on ISI-indexed papers, and the personnel are under pressure; this will take us a lot of time. Although we are the teaching faculty members, we have been led to the research... I personally came into conclusion that education itself is not important for the university; the instructor's teaching style is not important either. Actually, the research aspect is considered as more significant."* (Instructor 4)

## 2. Clinical education problems

The gap between theoretical education and clinical training, lack of some educators' focus on clinical aspects in education, and attention to patient as the center of care are the main concerns of the model instructors.

*"Whatever is taught in the class should be observed in practice, in internship; some colleagues are, unfortunately, indifferent to this issue and don't enter the process of patients' care."* (Instructor 6)

*"In some cases, the patient does not attend to from the various holistic aspects*

*and humanistic perspectives; so it cannot be expected from the students to learn the holistic care."* (Instructor 4)

Confronted with these challenges, the model trainers act to reduce the existing deficits; in this regard, the model instructors and students pointed to the following guidelines in clinical care:

• Application of the theoretical knowledge in patient's care

*"The instructor showed us an old woman with a huge abdomen from ascites; it will be always in my mind; the ascites we've read in the books has been easily kept in my mind."* (FG1)

*"In training the students, I show the disease symptoms to the students objectively and explain them how to care."* (T6).

• Attention to provision of a holistic care

*"As we saw the case, the instructor explained us really well and told us the manner of care; he/she also asked the patient, assessed him/her, diagnosed and did the evaluation at the same time; we saw the nursing process completely."* (FG1)

• Attention to provision of a human-centered care

*"I feel that patients are human beings; I sympathize with them."* (T6)

*"Our educator told us never to forget, and to be sure that what we do for patients will one day come back to us in a situation that we are really in need of help."* (FG3)

• The necessity of involvement in the care process

*"The professors themselves are eagerly engaged in patients' care."* (FG1)

## 3. Negative impact of colleagues

Colleagues' criticism towards the model instructors due to different functions stresses the educators. In this respect, one of the trainers says:

*"In student-counseling and classroom-related discussions, the colleagues sometimes criticize me for acting in a certain way. Well, many would criticize me for giving the class content to the students!"* He/she continues, *"these objections would sometimes bother,*

*but would not be preventive.” (Instructor 3)*

4. Weakness in the application of research results in clinical practice

The model instructors have pointed to failure in the application of research results in clinical practice.

*“Much of the research conducted in schools of nursing is not used in clinical practice.” (Instructor 6)*

The strategies used by the educators to solve these problems include: 1. Conduction of the research on the basis of care needs, 2. Presentation of the research papers on clinical innovations, 3. Evidence-based teaching, and 4. Application of the research results in patients’ care.

*“I ask my students what they would do in this situation according to what’s written in that article. I work this way.” (T5)*

*“I don’t want to just stick to my own knowledge; it’s really important to me to see what the others have obtained in their research, and use their findings for my patients.” (T5)*

B) Inappropriate professional position

Instructors were complaining about people’s negative attitude towards their profession, low social position of the nursing profession, and lack of appropriate professional status in clinical practice.

*“The attitude the people have towards our profession is always bothering me.” (Instructor 6)*

*“The professor told us to know the nurse as a nurse, to understand what really the nursing is; one is to perceive the nursing position and the other is to show its scientific identity.” (FG1)*

C) Ineffective inter-professional interactions

The students indicated that the model instructors did not consider the current inter-professional interactions effective and efficient and, hence, they try to establish effective inter-professional communications.

*“My model instructor would always say, ‘Why do you go out when the medical students and their professors round? You*

*have to be inside the room. You are a nursing student and have to be in contact with the medical team.” (FG2)*

*“He/she told the nurse, she didn’t call us or involve us in patients-related issues, why did she do that! ‘My student is your colleagues and you have to come along with him/her.” (FG2)*

## DISCUSSION

The study results demonstrated that the role-model nursing instructors have many professional concerns in training the nursing students. A study by Kwok-wai showed that instructors’ concerns about teaching depend on their professional promotion, so as individual concerns, such as preparation for teaching, are the main concerns of the novice educators, they gradually develop task concerns and finally the impact concerns.<sup>6</sup> The interesting point illustrated by this study, however, is that professional concerns of the role-model instructors go beyond their individual concerns, for their work experience and type of concerns have been in accordance with Kwok-wai’s study.

The necessity of training, promotion and continuing education for nursing personnel is a worldwide concern.<sup>14</sup> The lack of self-actualization is among the concerns of nursing educators.<sup>7</sup> Anthony et al. have also reported educational promotion as one of the five concerns of the nurses; similarly, educational efficiency was one of the concerns of the role-model instructors in this study.<sup>16</sup>

Time constraints (demands) have also been enumerated as nursing instructors’ concerns as well.<sup>7,8</sup> Likewise, problems in educational planning, such as large volume of content, led to the “time constraint” concern in presenting the formal curriculum content among the model instructors.

Krause has stated that development of the nursing discipline as well as the profession is essential to maintain the integrity of nursing profession.<sup>13</sup> The model trainers also believed in following the laws and rule-orientation.

Care is the ultimate goal of the health systems.<sup>17</sup> Care-providing manner, clinical performance,<sup>15,16</sup> and providing a holistic care are the main concerns of nurses and the nursing profession.<sup>16</sup>

The educators should focus on the application of professional knowledge in clinical environments and help nursing students through role-modeling strategies, problem-solving activities and critical thinking to properly play their role.<sup>41</sup> There is a direct and bilateral relationship between the concept of professional power and application of knowledge and skills in nursing activities.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the importance of nursing education, studies conducted in Iran have indicated the inefficiency of theoretical and clinical training for nursing students. The quality of care provided by nurses has declined, and the gap between theory and clinical practice has been raised within nursing education; in this regard, the nursing education system has not operated properly.<sup>43</sup>

Nursing students experienced anxiety as a result of feeling incompetent and had a lack of professional nursing skills and knowledge to take care of various patients in the clinical setting.<sup>44</sup> The interesting finding of this research is the successful role-model instructors' concerns about the need to promote care-providing manner by the students in clinical practice; it has been demonstrated by the application of theory to practice, involvement in the patient care process, and attention to providing a holistic, human-centered, and enthusiastic care.

Studies show that research and scholarship are the concerns of nurses and the nursing profession;<sup>15,16</sup> likewise, research-centered nursing has been one of concerns discussed by the role-model nursing educators in the present study. Professional independence and demonstration of scientific identity of nursing profession were the other concerns of the model instructors, as professional growth and independence have led to job satisfaction among nursing educators,<sup>15</sup> in

many professions, the collaboration concern has also been pointed out.<sup>45</sup>

Professional development is a wide socio-cultural process in which the individual assumes values, attitudes, moral comprehension, information and skills from the group. It can be seen as the perpetual process in which a person continually learns new kinds of social roles, which are expedient to the membership of the group. Open communication and solidarity between staff and students are essential conditions of this process.<sup>46</sup>

Communication between nurses and physicians is another professional concern of the nurses,<sup>16</sup> and the relationships with administrators, other teachers, other school staff and supervisors are the concerns of the nursing educators,<sup>7,8</sup> since poor communication between administrators and colleagues could lead to conflict.<sup>47</sup> The interaction between nurses and the medical team has been also mentioned as the successful model instructors' concern in the present research.

It should be noted that professional concerns and challenges may affect job satisfaction, as well as physical and mental health,<sup>8</sup> and attention to various issues of teaching and care as ongoing sources of stress seems to be necessary for model instructors.<sup>48</sup>

The main concerns of the model instructors were effective learning, attention to patient as the center of care, application of the theoretical knowledge in patients' care and attention to providing a holistic care. In fact, these concerns were about the development of theory and clinical education in the nursing students and since nursing students are prospective nurses and are core of the health care, so attention to these concerns will promote health.

It is recommended that special attention be paid to professional development, prevention of job dissatisfaction, and implementation of role-modeling strategies regarding the concerns of the successful model instructors.



## CONCLUSION

Since role modeling is one of the most appropriate ways for the promotion of nursing education, identifying and resolving the concerns of this group of model teachers can be effective in improving the nursing education. Regarding the concerns of successful model instructors, it is recommended that professional development, prevention of job dissatisfaction, and implementation of role modeling strategies be emphasized. As role modeling is an effective way to promote nursing education, identifying and resolving the concerns of this group may be effective in improving nursing education overall. Meanwhile, reducing the clinical training problems in order to modify the educational research system was recognized to be the most important professional concern of the role-model nursing educators.

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