

The Need for Mandatory Mental Health Continuing Education among Registered Nurses

Nilam Kumari Singh

MBA in Health Care Management, Texila American University, Cayman Islands

Abstract

Continuing medical education is integral to lifelong learning and constitutes a vital aspect of keeping registered nurses' knowledge and skills up to date. This supports best practices and the effectiveness of any interventions. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the need for mandatory mental health continuing education for practicing registered nurses. This was a descriptive cross-sectional quantitative study with a sample size of 27 registered nurses working in Health care settings in the Cayman Islands. These participants were selected using non-probability sampling technique. Convenience sampling was the chosen method. A 25 items Questionnaire was used to collect the data. Closed-ended questions, and a Likert scale were used to collect the demographic data and to measure the nurses' perceptions of the need for the intervention under study. Analysis of the data was accomplished with Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics were generated. The results revealed that only a few registered nurses were extremely confident (7.40%) or quite confident (37.04%) in their ability to manage the care of patients with mental illnesses. The majority (88.89%) of nurses believed that there is a need for continuous medical education in mental health topics and that it should be mandatory (92%) for registered nurses. They believe and that this will make them more confident in their delivery of care to patients with underlying mental illnesses. Hence, it can be concluded that continuing education in this aspect of nursing will be beneficial for both them and the patients they care for.

Keywords: *Continuing education, Mental health, Mental illnesses, Nurses, Patients, Training.*

Introduction

Mental health is more than just the nonexistence of mental disorders or disabilities. Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community [1]. A mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect an individual's ability to function. Mental illness refers to a range of mental health conditions; these conditions or disorders affect mood, thinking, and behavior [2]. People with severe mental illness have higher rates of morbidity and mortality of

chronic diseases than the general population [3]. It is inevitable that a general nurse on the ward or critical care will face a patient with a mental health illness. Mental illness is on the rise. It is estimated 30–50% of patients admitted to acute medical care settings experience co-morbid physical and mental illness [4]. A report stated that hospitals in the Cayman Islands experienced a 30% increase in admissions of mentally ill clients [5]. Another report estimated that 30–50% of patients admitted to acute medical care settings experience co-morbid physical and mental illness [6]. There are regional and global initiatives to decrease the burden of mental illness on healthcare institutions, the government, and society [7, 8].

The International Council of Nurses states that nursing includes the promotion of health, prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled, and dying people. Elaborating the definition, it is further defined as an integral part of the health care system, encompasses the promotion of health, prevention of illness, and care of physically ill, mentally ill, and disabled people of all ages, in all health care and other community settings [9]. Therefore, the registered nurses on the general wards and MICU/SICU need to be confident regarding providing care to the mentally ill as well. It is a nurse's responsibility to provide holistic and competent nursing care to all. Confidence leads to better clinical practice in all levels of healthcare workers [10, 11]. A major report from NHS hospitals stated that "Hospital staff often lack the knowledge or confidence to care for people with mental health conditions appropriately" [12]. Many studies show that nurses are willing to participate in mental health continuing education to provide quality care to their patients [13, 14, 15]. Continuing education interventions are said to "help maintain clinical competence and are mandated by regulatory bodies" [16]. Continuing education maintains the current practice and provide updates on new theories and evidence of best practice that helps to promote the provision of quality healthcare [17]. Continuing education is the core of nurses lifelong learning and comprises essential aspects for keeping nurses up to date with knowledge and skills [18, 19, 20]. Continuing education is also directly related to nurses' career satisfaction [21]. Therefore, the aim of the study was to explore the need for mandatory mental health continuing education among registered nurses at a selected hospital in Cayman Island.

Materials and Methods

This was a descriptive cross-sectional quantitative study. The population was registered nurses working in Health care settings at in the Cayman Islands. The sample

size of 27 registered nurses was used. Of this total, 19% (n=5) were male, and 81% (n=22) were females. These participants were selected using the non-probability sampling technique. Convenience sampling was the chosen method.

Inclusion Criteria

Registered nurses who have not completed specialist psychiatric nursing education were included.

Data Collection and Analysis

A 25 items Questionnaire was used to collect the data. Closed-ended questions were used to collect the demographics and data regarding mental health education acquired and management of the mentally ill. The demographic data included gender, age, years of experience, and primary work unit. Mental health education explored theoretic knowledge and clinical practice skills gained in an undergraduate program, knowledge gained from continuing education, belief regarding the demand and need for mandatory mental health continuing education, and the topics of interest. Topics of interest were a multiple response item. Management of the mentally ill addressed recent provision of care to the mentally ill patient, the importance of mental health care, and the ability to perform basic mental health examinations.

A Likert scale was used to assess how much the participants agreed that the undergraduate program prepared them for working with the mentally ill, how useful continuing education would be to them, how often they cared for a patient with co-morbid mental illness, and how confident they felt about the care delivered, administering psychotropic drugs, and managing mental health emergencies. The effectiveness of their communication, familiarity with different treatment modalities, and level of knowledge regarding ethical and legal issues relating to mental health nursing were also measured using a Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed to the target

population in hard copy. Consent was taken from each of them. Analysis of the data was accomplished with Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics (percentages) were generated and presented in tables. Percentages were used as the researcher wanted to report how many participants felt it was necessary to have mandatory continuing mental health education.

Results

During the study, 27 registered nurses (RNs) participated, 81% (n=22) were female while

19% (n=5) were male. Most of the RN's belonged to the age group of 21–30 years. Years of experience ranged from 2 years or less up to 15 years, of which the modal response was 3 to 5 years (n=12). The Nurses worked primarily on their units, the multi-specialty (n=8), the intensive care unit (ICU) (n=11), and the surgical intensive care unit (SICU) (n= 8) (See Table 1).

Table 2 shows that majority of nurses, 23 (85.18%), have never attended CME in Mental health nursing.

Table 1. Basic Characteristics of the Study Participants

Characteristics (N=27)	N (%)
Gender	
Male	5(19%)
Female	22(81%)
Age Range	
21-30	18(66.7%)
31-40	9(33.3%)
Years of Experience	
2 or less	3(11.1%)
3 to 5	12(44.5%)
6 to 10	6(22.2%)
11 to 15	6(22.2%)
Primary Work Unit	
Multi-specialty ward	8(29.6%)
ICU	11(40.8%)
SICU	8(29.6%)

Table 2. Nurses Attendance at Continuing Education in Mental Health Nursing

Responses (N=27)	%(n)
Yes	14.81% (4)
No	85.19% (23)

The majority of the nurses, 26 (96.29%), acknowledge that mental health is an essential

component of nursing care, whereas 3.71% (n=1) are unsure in Table 3.

Table 3. Nurses who Acknowledge that Mental Health is an Essential Component of Nursing Care

Responses (N=27)	N (%)
Yes	26(96.29%)
Unsure	1(3.71%)

The majority of the nurses, 18(67%), face hindrance sometimes, 3(11%) often, 3(11%)

usually, 2 (7%) rarely, and 1(4%) never when caring for patients with mental illnesses.

Table 4. The Frequency at which Nurse Face Hindrances in Nursing Care to Patients with Co-morbid Mental Disorders

Responses	N (%)
Never	1(4%)
Rarely	2(7%)
Sometimes	18(67%)
Often	3(11%)
Usually	3(11%)

The results in Table 5 shows that, few registered nurses were extremely confident (7.40%) or quite confident (37.04%) in their ability to manage the care of patients with mental illnesses. It also shows that one-third of the nurses (32%) were quite confident while none were extremely confident with managing mental health emergencies. Approximately half

of them (46%) reported being somewhat confident. Less than half of the nurses (41%) felt quite confident, while one-ninth felt extremely confident with the management and administration of psychotropic medications. The rest of the nurses were somewhat (29%), slightly confident (15%), or not confident at all (4%).

Table 5. Nurses Confidence in Care for Patients with Co-morbid Mental Illnesses, Managing Mental Health Emergencies, and Administering of Psychotropic Medications

Confidence levels	Caring for patients with Co-morbid mental illnesses N (%)	Managing mental health emergencies N (%)	Management and administration of psychotropic medications N (%)
Not confident	0(0%)	1(4%)	1(4%)
Slightly confident	5(18.52%)	5(18%)	4(15%)
Somewhat confident	10(37.04%)	13(46%)	8(29%)
Quite confident	10(37.04%)	9(32%)	11(41%)
Extremely confident	2(7.40%)	0(0%)	3(11%)
Total (N=27)			

As shown in Table 6, all the topics assessed were of interest to more than half of the participants. However, assessment skills, communication skills, treatment modalities, and

managing emergencies were the topics with the highest interest. Nurses were allowed to choose all the topics that were of interest to him or her.

Table 6. Nurses Responses to Mental Health Topics of Interest

Topics of Interest	n (%)
Assessment skills relating to mental health disorders	22 (81.48%)
Treatment modalities of mental disorders	19(70.37%)
Legal and ethical issues	14(51.85%)
Management of emergencies (e.g., suicidal behaviour, violence, and aggression)	19(70.37%)
Risk Assessment	16(59.25%)
Management of psychotropic medications	17(62.96%)
Substance abuse	14(51.85%)
Communication skills	21(77.77%)

As presented in Table 7, the majority of the nurses felt that there is a demand for continuing

education in mental health and that it should be mandatory, 88.89% and 92% respectively.

Table 7. Nurses' Perception Regarding the Demand for Mental Health Continuing Education and Making it

Responses (N=27)	Demand for Mental Health Continuing Education	Making Mental Health Continuation Mandatory
Yes	24(88.89%)	25(92%)
No	3(11.11%)	1(4%)
Unsure		1(4%)

Discussion

This study revealed that only a few registered nurses working in the selected hospital in the Cayman Islands are extremely confident (7.40%) or quite confident (37.04%) in their ability to manage the care of patients with mental illnesses. This is in spite of them all completing a mental health course that had both theory and practicum in their undergraduate studies and the majority (74.07%) agreed that it prepared them to manage these patients. This is reflected in the response of the majority of nurses who believe that continuous medical education in mental health is in demand (88.89%) and that it should be made mandatory (92%). At the time of this study, most of the nurses (85.18%) had not participated in continuing medical education in mental health, and none had post-graduate mental health nursing certification. From the multiple responses to the mental health topics of interest, it seemed clear that the registered nurses were willing to attend programmes to gain core competencies in mental health nursing. The topics with the highest interest were assessment skills relating to mental health disorders (81.48%), treatment modalities of mental disorders (70.37%), management of emergencies (e.g., suicidal behavior, violence, and aggression) (70.37%), and communication skills (77.77%).

The present findings show that nurses having difficulty providing care for patients with mental illnesses and agree that there is demand for continuing medical education in mental health and show interest in participating in this

intervention. These findings are consistent with other reports that indicate that nurses are experiencing challenges and are motivated and have a desire to achieve competency in providing care to this group of patients [13]. There is evidence that this need is not merely among graduate or general nurses but also among qualified mental health nurses [14, 15]. As with the findings of this study, empirical studies also support the need for further training in violence and aggression management, management of suicidal patients, assessment, and communication skills is important even among qualified mental health nurses [14]. Additionally, there are other calls for general nurses to have more training in mental health issues in order to intervene and prevent suicide [22]. The present findings, along with other studies, indicate that nurses believe that there is a need for continuing medical education in mental health. However, no literature was found to compare them agreeing with it being mandatory. Also, this study did not investigate the preferred method of attaining this education and the nurses' availability to participate in this intervention. Therefore, further study can be done to ascertain the best methods and times to address the nurses' needs.

Recommendations

The result of this study is clear, and therefore, the recommendation is that all Registered nurses should attend at least 2-3 CME's per year in Mental Health education to make them updated. The study sample for this study was small. However, it provided valuable information for further studies. In the future, a

qualitative study using focus groups can be conducted to gain further insight into what affects the confidence levels of the nurses and to explore the best methods for providing continuing education in mental health. This will ensure that all nurses gain access to the interventions that they require.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the need for mandatory mental health continuing education for practicing registered nurses. The finding indicated that only a few nurses are extremely confident or quite confident when caring for patients with underlying mental illnesses and

References

- [1] International Council of Nurses, 2002, Nursing Definitions ICN - International Council of Nurses. In *International Council of Nurses (ICN)*. Date of access <https://www.icn.ch/nursing-policy/nursing-definitions>.
- [2] Mayo Clinic. ,2019, Mental illness - Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic. Mayo Clinic Online. Date of access <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/symptoms-causes/syc-20374968>.
- [3] Robson, D., & Gray, R. (2007). Serious mental illness and physical health problems: A discussion paper. In *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 44 (3),457–466.
- [4] Giandinoto J. A., & Edward K. L., 2015, The phenomenon of co-morbid physical and mental illness in acute medical care: The lived experience of Australian health professionals. *BMC Research Notes*, 8(1), 295.
- [5] Muckenfuss M., 2018, Symposium promotes early intervention for mental illness. *Cayman Compass*, 02, November.
- [6] Giandinoto J. A., & Edward K. L., 2015, The phenomenon of co-morbid physical and mental illness in acute medical care: The lived experience of Australian health professionals. *BMC Research Notes*, 8(1), 295.
- [7] Pan American Health Organization, 2014,

that most nurses would like mental health continuing education to be made mandatory. Therefore, the findings will help greatly with advocacy for this intervention. It is a nurse's ethical responsibility to provide holistic and quality care for all.

Conflict of Interest

The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, praise and thanks to God, the Almighty, for showers of blessings.

- PAHO/WHO / Mental health mission in Jamaica. https://www3.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14653:mision-de-salud-mental-en-jamaica&Itemid=42050&lang=en.
- [8] WHO | WHO-AIMS - General Information, 2015, https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/WHO-AIMS/en/World_Health_Organization. (2018). *Constitution*. <https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>.
 - [9] International Council of Nurses, 2002,, Nursing Definitions ICN - International Council of Nurses. In *International Council of Nurses (ICN)*. <https://www.icn.ch/nursing-policy/nursing-definitions>.
 - [10] Sturgiss E, Haesler E, Elmitt N, et al., 2017, Increasing general practitioners' confidence and self-efficacy in managing obesity: a mixed-methods study. *BMJ Open*, 7(1), 1-6. Date of access: 16/08/2021. <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/>.
 - [11] Carlson K. 2018, Nurse keith: Boosting nurses' confidence. American Sentinel University. Date of access: 16/08/2021. <https://www.americansentinel.edu/blog/2018/01/11/nurse-keith-boosting-nurses-confidence/>.
 - [12] Alistair Kleebauer A, 2019, Hospital staff lack confidence and knowledge to care for people with mental health conditions, warns the report. *Nursing Standard*. Date of access: 16/08/2021 <https://rcni.com/nursing->

standard/newsroom/news/hospital-staff-lack-confidence-and-knowledge-to-care-people-mental-health-conditions-warns-report-75481.

[13] Sharrock J., & Happell B., 2007, Competence in providing mental health care: A grounded theory analysis of nurse's experiences. *The Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing: A Quarterly Publication of the Royal Australian Nursing Federation*, 24, 9–15.

[14] Moschovopoulou, Anatoli & Efthymios, Valkanos & Papastamatis, Adamantios & Giavrimis, Panagiotis. (2011). Training Needs of Psychiatric Nursing Staff in Acute Wards. An Empirical Study in the Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki, Greece. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. 1. 10.6007/ijarbss.v1i3.47.

[15] Jones J, Lowe T., 2003, The education and training needs of qualified mental health nurses working in acute adult mental health services. *Nurse Education Today*. Nov;23(8):610-619. DOI: 10.1016/s0260-6917(03)00101-1. PMID: 14554115.

[16] Hartley H, Smith JD, Vandyk A, 2019, Systematic review of continuing education interventions for licensed nurses working in psychiatry. *J Contin Educ Nurs*. 50(5),233-240.

[17] Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Planning a Continuing Health Professional Education Institute, 2010, Redesigning Continuing Education in the Health Professions. Continuing

Professional Development: Building and Sustaining a Quality Workforce. (Washington (DC), US: National Academies Press).

[18] Mlambo, M., Silén, C. & McGrath, C., 2021, Lifelong learning and nurses continuing professional development, a meta-synthesis of the literature. *BMC Nurs* 20, 62. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-021-00579-2>.

[19] Chang E., Daly J., Bell P., Brown T., Allan, J., Hancock, K. 2002, A continuing educational initiative to develop nurses mental health knowledge and skills in rural and remote areas. *Nurse Education Today*, 22(7), 542-551.

[20] Usher K., Park T., Trueman S., Redman-Maclaren M., Casella E., & Woods C., 2014, An educational program for mental health nurses and community health workers from Pacific island countries: results from a pilot study. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 35(5), 337–343. <https://doi.org/10.3109/01612840.2013.868963>.

[21] Price S, Reichert C., 2017, The importance of continuing professional development to career satisfaction and patient care: Meeting the needs of novice to mid-to late-career nurses throughout their career span. *Administrative Sciences*, 7(2), 17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci7020017>.

[22] Staines R., 2010, Preventing male suicides: call for general nurses to have more mental health training. *Mental Health Practice*, 13(9), 8–9.