

In COVID-19, Unmet Needs of Nursing Students Participating in Limited Clinical Practice

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Abstract

Background: This study was conducted to identify unmet needs through qualitative research on students who have experienced clinical practice and alternative practice that are suddenly limited to COVID-19 situations.

Method: Qualitative research using focus group interviews involved five junior students with untact or limited clinical practice experience.

Finding: The unmet needs of nursing students were analyzed as four categories based on “lack of various media and visual materials” and “need to strengthen self-directed learning capabilities.”

Conclusion: The results of this study suggested that nursing students who experienced untact or limited clinical practice experience are demanding education that utilizes various media and enhances self-directed learning, despite suffering from a lack of direct field experience and burden on tasks. Therefore, education programs should be developed to meet these needs.

Keywords: *Clinical practice, Nursing students, Qualitative research, Unmet needs*

Introduction

In the course of education for nursing students, clinical practice is an essential factor in inducing learning through self-regulation and reflection while experiencing practical clinical field¹. In addition, the Korea Nursing Education Evaluation Institute suggests that nursing students conduct more than 1,000 hours of clinical practice during the curriculum². However, with the spread of COVID-19 occurring from the end of 2019, many medical institutions do not permit practice or operate within a limited range³, alternative efforts are required for clinical practice.

Under the conditions of fendemic due to COVID-19, nursing education institutions take various measures such as in-school practice or simulation practice using online media to replace clinical practice⁴. However, it is not certain whether these alternatives can achieve the goals of integrating knowledge and practice,

improving communication and decision-making skills, and acquiring time management skills⁵. There was also a positive aspect that if school practice was used effectively, it could receive immediate feedback from professors. However, the absence of direct contact with patients has a lower sense of reality about learning, and there are greater negative consequences, such as growing fear of future nurse roles⁶. Against this backdrop, it is necessary to identify what elements of learning students who actually participated in the replaced practical classes feel lacking.

Some prior studies^{7, 8} have reported that simulation practice using virtual reality enables hands-on experience of patient experience. However, another alternative is needed because long-term simulation practices cannot be implemented throughout the practice that replaces clinical practice. In addition, some studies^{9, 10} reported that nursing students who did in-school

practice experience expansion of knowledge through various clinical situations, but negative nurse images are formed and accept reality while experiencing chaos and skepticism. Clinical practice may serve as a partially negative experience, but it can be said to be an essential element of learning the actual field that nursing students face after graduation. In practice, which is inevitably applied as a substitute for clinical practice in a fendemic situation by COVID-19, it will need to be structured for the ultimate purpose of this learning.

Thus, in this study, we seek to identify unmet needs through qualitative research on students who have experienced clinical practice and alternative practice that are suddenly limited to COVID-19 situations. In addition, we would like to present a strategy to organize effective clinical practice alternatives through an understanding of the unmet needs of students who are participants in learning.

Methods

Study design: This study is a qualitative survey study attempted to identify the unmet needs caused by limited clinical practice participation. This study conducted a focus group interview method that has the advantage of collecting data from various perspectives

through interactions between group members in deriving experiences by retrospect¹¹.

Participants: The subject of this study is a junior nursing student who has completed a clinical practice course for one year. Participating students had experience with untact practice during the first semester due to COVID-19, and limited clinical practice during the next semester. Five nursing students participated in the study through the recruitment process.

Data Collection: The data collection was conducted through an interview in January 2021. In order to give study participants time to think about the topic, questions were organized and delivered in the form of questionnaires three days before the interview (Table 1). All questions were open-ended, and the key questions were “Which of untact or limited clinical practices did you experience?” or “What are your requests for untact or limited clinical practices?”.

Interviews were conducted in small classrooms within the school, and were arranged to sit around a round table so that they could talk face to face with each other. The interview took about 90 minutes, and two recorders were recorded in a place where all participants’ voices could be heard.

Table 1: Questions for focus group interviews

| Categories | Contents |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Opening | 1. Would you introduce yourself to each participant? |
| Transition | 2. What kind of clinical practice did you carry out after COVID-19 outbreak? |
| Key | 3. What were your expectations for clinical practice? 4. Which of untact or limited clinical practices did you experience? 5. What are your requests for untact or limited clinical practices? |

Data Analysis: Within two weeks of the focus group interview, the recording was completed. Data analysis was done using Giorgi¹² data analysis method. The analysis process was conducted in three stages, in

which the transcription was comprehensively identified, the similar meaning code was collected to classify units, and the measuring units were transformed into the closest academic representation.

Results

In this study, an analysis of the unmet needs of nursing students who have experienced untact or limited clinical practice has identified four categories and collections of eight themes (Table 2).

Table 2: Categories and theme clusters

| Categories | Theme clusters |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Disappointment of lack of practical field experience | - Disappointment of lack of experience in rapport - Disappointed with the lack of experience in various cases |
| Feeling burdened by heavy hands-on tasks | - Heavy task that builds up every day - Tasks that require repetitive writing processes |
| Lack of various media and visual materials | - Requirements for audio-visual materials, such as videos - Need for the variety of hands-on time configurations |
| Need to strengthen self-directed learning capabilities | - Strategies to improve self-directed learning during class - Inspiration of self-planning and learning consciousness |

Categories 1: Disappointment of lack of practical field experience: *(participant 1, 2)*

The students performed various activities such as virtual case analysis and major disease literature examination with untact or limited practice. However, the students were regretting that they could not experience hands-on learning through direct contact with patients and the experience of rapport formation with patients.

"I actively participated in learning through virtual cases, but I was very sorry that I didn't have a chance to form rapport with real patients." (participant 2)

Categories 2: Feeling burdened by heavy hands-on tasks

The nursing students were given more tasks to meet their practice time in the untact or limited clinical practice process. In addition, students felt a lot of pressure on the task as more tasks were required to write handwritten notes to enhance the sincerity of the task.

"I was physically challenged because I had to write my own assignment every day for every day."

Categories 3: Lack of various media and visual materials

The nursing students were asked to provide more visual materials such as videos and run various programs because they had to fill up the time they practiced in the field with other activities.

"I thought programs such as virtual simulation and video training materials were much more needed." (participant 3, 5)

Categories 4: Need to strengthen self-directed learning capabilities

The nursing students realized that they needed self-directed learning capabilities as they had more time to learn on their own without field leaders in the untact or limited clinical practice process.

"It wasn't easy to concentrate on myself. I would like you to tell me how to help me with effective self-directed learning." (participant 4)

Discussion

In this study, it was intended to identify the unmet needs of nursing students who suddenly experienced untact or limited clinical practice. Unmet needs derived from the results of the study were ‘lack of various media and visual materials’ and ‘need to strengthen self-directed learning capabilities’.

First, the category ‘Disappointment of black of practical field experience’ showed that despite various alternative efforts, it was difficult to fully complement the actual site. Direct clinical on-site hands-on participation can not only improve the quality of nursing students’ learning but also increase awareness of their responsibilities as future nurses¹³. Kim et al.⁶ reported that group activities or simulations were used when clinical practice was replaced by in-school practice, but did not meet the expectations of participants due to differences in field experience. Therefore, close cooperation with hospitals will be needed to provide maximum field experience, and the replacement practice time will require the development of complementary programs to enhance the sense of field experience.

The second category, ‘Feeling Burden by Heavy Hands-on tasks’, expresses difficulties in the tasks given to students in order to produce evidence of actual practice-time operations^{6, 14}. To solve these students’ difficulties, technical approaches need to be attempted, such as developing a computer program that can be used continuously during the practice time and proving the practice time.

The third and fourth categories are actually the results that correspond to factors that participants feel lacked in non-face-to-face or limited clinical practice Ha & Lee¹⁵ suggested that alternative practices in schools were applied using online group discussions, problem-based learning, and case-based learning, and that the most influential factor in problem-solving skills was the motivation. Similarly, participants in this study called for education that could enhance self-directed learning. It is required to construct a program to achieve performance step by step through self-directed learning^{16, 17}, which

is thought to result in reinforcement of the learning motivation¹⁸. The nursing students who participated in this study asked for more visual materials and media utilization. In many prior studies¹⁹⁻²¹ conducted on nursing college students, the effects of learning using video clips were presented. There is management of field leaders during practice at the actual clinical field, but in the case of untact or alternative practice, students themselves have to use their time during the given practice time, so strategic development such as video is even more required.

In this study, there is a limit to the generalization of the results of the study because the experience of a minority of participants was collected on the basis of retrospect and the data was analyzed. In situations where COVID-19 persists, iterative studies analyzing the experiences and needs of untact learners need to be conducted. Based on the results of this study, we also propose to conduct research on program development that can reduce gaps with clinical sites, systematically change tasks for practice time management, and induce self-directed learning using various media.

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Conflicts of Interest: None

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