Medical Errors and Easing the Burden of Paperwork for the Nurse

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Description

The number of nursing faculty experienced and skilled in research and scholarship is declining because of retirement and insufficient numbers of new scholars entering academia. This trend, alone, puts the future development of the nursing profession at risk. In addition, the increasing expectations placed upon the existing professoriate in the teaching and essential institutional service arenas necessitated by this shortage limit both the time and energy of senior faculty who are most qualified to advance the profession. The historical development of nursing as a profession is grounded in its affiliation with institutions of higher education that provided the support and opportunities for nursing scholarship. The viability of any profession is dependent upon the ongoing generation and dissemination of knowledge. In the current and predicted environments, nursing academic institutions and individual faculty must acknowledge the fundamental role of research and scholarship in the advancement of the profession and seek methods by which they can provide support. Strategies for institutional and individual action are offered so that the knowledge base of the profession will continue to develop.

The uses of new and emerging technologies are being considered key to decreasing medical errors and easing the burden of paperwork for the nurse. As healthcare increasingly focuses on timely information to drive decision-making and to support the electronic health record, the use of informatics to support practice must be integrated into nursing education program curricula to prepare graduates for the workforce of which informatics is increasingly an integral part.

The importance of including informatics knowledge and skills within nursing curricula is well supported in nursing literature and by major professional organizations. In 1997, the Division of Nursing of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) convened the National Nursing Informatics Work Group (NNIWG) comprised of 19 experts in the country to advise the National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice (NACNEP) about priorities for nursing informatics education and practice in the U.S. From these recommendations, the National Informatics Agenda for Nursing Education and Practice was generated as well as recommendations for including core computing and Nursing Informatics (NI) concepts in nursing curricula.

The American Nurses Association recently revised the Scope and Standards for Nursing Informatics Practice. Within these standards, computer literacy skills, information literacy skills and overall informatics competencies are delineated for the beginning nurse, experienced nurse and the Informatics Nurse Specialist. Computer literacy skills include use of word processor, database, and spreadsheet software, and using email and other informatics applications to document care. Information literacy is a skill set that enables the nurse to locate, access and evaluate information. Access includes the ability to conduct bibliographic retrievals and to locate, retrieve, and evaluate information from the Internet. Overall informatics competencies are those that relate to the care of patients such as interpreting patient and nurse information, using informatics applications for nursing and addressing privacy, confidentiality and security of information in nursing practice.

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A complete review of the last 15 years of empirical studies addressing the integration of information technology competencies and the progression of information technology in nursing education can be found in the article by Staggers, Gassert and Curran. They concluded that the integration of information technology knowledge and skills into nursing education curricula has been a slow process and that no consistent curricula for nursing information technology exist in nursing education programs. The work of Staggers, Gassert, and Curran has been the most recent work in promoting information technology in nursing education. Using a review of the literature from 1986 to 1998, and input from a panel of NI experts, these authors have developed 304 nursing informatics competencies for four levels of practicing nurses: beginning nurse, experienced nurse, informatics nurse specialist and informatics innovator. The broad categories of competencies and accompanying specific competencies should guide nurse educators in designing curricula to prepare nurses for all levels of professional practice.

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