

Commentary: A dementia education programme for pre-registration nurses: a protocol for process and outcomes evaluation

Journal of Research in Nursing
1–2
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DOI: 10.1177/17449871241283915
journals.sagepub.com/home/jrn


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It is extremely timely that we have been given the opportunity to comment on this paper as this is an area that we have been investigating from a postgraduate perspective over the past number of months. As the paper points out dementia presents a global health challenge with the number of people living with this condition continuing to rise, year on year. We concur from our recent research that nurses, overall do not have the knowledge and skills required to provide person-centred dementia care, and this impacts on their confidence and attitudes towards the person living with this condition. The papers' literature review findings support our own findings that there is a requirement for dementia education provision that applies diverse modalities that emphasise the patient's stories in a meaningful way, thus promoting compassionate, person-centred evidence-based care. We acknowledge that dementia education should be regarded as mandatory and welcome this emphasis on prioritising dementia education at undergraduate level.

This paper outlines the iterative approach to the development of a scaffolded approach to dementia education across the three academic programmes, including interprofessional and voluntary sector collaborations, which are essential for the holistic overview of the care of the person living with dementia. The study sought to evaluate the impact of the education programme on the knowledge, attitude and confidence of the undergraduate students while also seeking to understand the elements of the programme that contributed to this impact. This is a key element as it allows the authors to 'explain discrepancies between expected and observed outcomes, to understand how context influences outcomes, and to provide insights to

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aid implementation' (Craig et al., 2008). This data will provide invaluable information for the academic community at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels to better understand how dementia education programmes can bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The authors propose combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the different elements of the programme, how it works in practice and the implications of changes in its implementation. Quantitative data will be collected at four different time points using three validated tools to compare participants' knowledge, confidence and attitudes pre and post attending the education programme. The authors piloted the tools along with demographic data questionnaires with 21 students, thereby validating the functionality of the online platform and ensuring reliability and ease of use for students. Qualitative data will be obtained from semi-structured interviews using a purposeful sampling technique. All students who have completed the programme will be asked to submit an expression of interest to participate in interviews with a view to topic data saturation. This will enable the authors to collect comprehensive data that reflects the diverse experiences and views of the students involved. Finally the authors will take field notes to capture detailed observations of the educational environment including nuances in interactions, nonverbal cues and the overall atmosphere. Concurrently, researchers will maintain reflective diaries to document personal thoughts, emotions and evolving perspectives. This will enable an understanding of the researchers' biases, assumptions and decision-making processes throughout the study, which the authors consider a critical component of their methodological approach. The use of field notes, reflective diaries and reflexive analysis facilitates the integration of the observed and the observer's experiences to the data collected. Ethical considerations have been examined and details on how ethical safeguarding will be maintained are provided. The study limitations were clearly outlined particularly concerning the generalisability and long-term sustainability of the dementia education programme's impact on practice. The authors state that the aim of the programme is to produce 'workforce ready nurses, proficient in high-quality dementia care'. As such, an area for future research could consider evaluation of the dementia education programme with nurses within dynamic clinical settings.

Overall, the paper offers a comprehensive and well-structured protocol for evaluating a much needed dementia education programme. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provides a robust framework for understanding and improving dementia care education for nursing students. This research holds significant potential to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ultimately contributing to enhanced dementia care practices and better patient outcomes.

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AnnMarie Kilgannon, Assistant Director of Nursing Dementia Quality Improvement with Ireland East Hospital Group, specialises in enhancing dementia care through her extensive experience in gerontology and commitment to older adults' well-being.

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