

Research on the Cultivation Path of Professional Literacy in Geriatric Nursing for Higher Vocational Nursing Students

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Abstract: With the rapid ageing of the population, the training of geriatric nursing staff has gradually been added to the list of problems in medical education. Higher vocational nursing education bears the main responsibility of cultivating geriatric nursing talents for the grassroots level, and the professional literacy of these students directly affects the quality of care and the sense of life among older adults. However, at present, the training for geriatric-nursing-related professional literacy among higher vocational nursing students generally lacks clear goals, fragmented systems, and insufficient practical experience; therefore, a systematic path needs to be designed. Based on the definition of the connotation of geriatric nursing professional literacy, this paper uses competency theory and situated learning theory to systematically analyze the structural dimensions and practical dilemmas in the professional literacy of higher vocational nursing students. It will also construct training paths from three aspects: curriculum system, practical teaching and humanistic literacy, and put forward a triple guarantee mechanism for faculty development, collaborative education and quality evaluation. The goal of this study is to offer an applicable practical model for geriatric nursing talent cultivation in higher vocational colleges and thus improve the quality and efficiency of elderly care services.

Keywords: Higher vocational nursing; Geriatric nursing; Professional literacy; Training pathways

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1. Introduction

The number of older people in China is rising, and thus the demand for specialized nursing services for disabled and semi-disabled older adults has been increasing steadily. For a long time, the two main problems facing the elderly-care industry have been a lack of staff and low levels of professional literacy among workers. As one of the main training bases for skill-oriented nursing talents, higher-vocational nursing colleges have produced a large number of graduates employed in grassroots elderly-care institutions. A person's professional literacy will directly affect the safety and quality of life for older adults. Unfortunately, higher-vocational colleges have not yet established a geriatric nursing training system suitable for an ageing

society. There are still some deficiencies, such as a gap between classroom teaching and real-life application, and a lack of deep-seated interest in learning. Therefore, exploring training paths for professional literacy that meet the characteristics of higher-vocational education and are tailored to the special needs of geriatric nursing carries real-world significance and academic value. Therefore, this paper hopes to provide some support for the above demands by establishing a training system.

2. Core concepts and theoretical foundations

2.1. Connotation definition of geriatric nursing professional literacy

Geriatric nursing professional literacy refers to the all-encompassing system of qualities and professional abilities that nursing staff should have in providing care services for older people. In addition to knowledge and skills, one should also know about the values of professionals, be aware of humanistic care, possess ethical judgment ability, and have practical wisdom for dealing with serious health issues in old age. At the bottom of this idea is general nursing literacy combined with the special demands of elderly care; it aims to provide all-around support for older adults' physical decline, psychological changes and social-role adaptation. The particularity of geriatric nursing professional literacy lies in an in-depth understanding of ageing and conscious protection of dignity at the end-of-life stage; therefore, it differs from the professional requirements for general clinical nursing in terms of stronger emotional engagement and ethical awareness ^[1].

2.2. Training orientation for students majoring in higher vocational nursing

Higher school nursing education aims to cultivate applied nursing talents for primary medical-health institutions and elderly-care facilities. The groups of students have different backgrounds for admission, varying levels of academic preparation, and unclear career plans. Undergraduate nursing education focuses more on research and management abilities; higher-vocational nursing, however, places more emphasis on the ability to perform post-operative practical skills and adaptability in a clinical setting. Therefore, the professional literacy training needs to meet the actual requirements of the front-line staff. With the deep-seated changes in the mode of nursing services due to an ageing population, the training focus for higher-education nursing students should shift from being solely about technical operators to becoming geriatric health managers, communicative coordinators and practitioners of humanistic care. A new goal for training has been set in recent years.

2.3. Theoretical basis for the study

Competency theory serves as the foundation for exploring the structure of geriatric nursing professional literacy. It shows the underlying reasons why high-performers are better than average performers, such as their motivations, traits, self-concept, knowledge and skills. It can help turn the abstract ideas of literacy into observable and learnable behaviors. Situated Learning Theory proposes that the process of acquiring professional literacy is inherently social; therefore, learners need to be immersed in actual or simulated work environments, and by participating in legitimate peripheral activities, they can gradually become proficient professionals. Lifelong learning theory also provides the theoretical basis for extending geriatric nursing literacy education. Therefore, it can be concluded that higher vocational education is merely the beginning of professional literacy, and the design of training paths should leave some space for further professional development of students ^[2].

3. Structure and requirements of geriatric nursing professional literacy

3.1. Dimensional composition of geriatric nursing professional literacy

The five interconnected components of geriatric nursing professionals' literacy can be divided into professional cognition, specialized knowledge, operational skills, humanistic sentiments and ethical literacy; together they constitute the whole picture of literacy training. Professional cognition provides the emotional basis for literacy development and includes the recognition of values and a sense of duty in geriatric nursing work. Specialized knowledge provides cognitive support for practice by introducing the physiological and psychological features of older adults, necessary care measures for common diseases, and rehabilitation and healthcare knowledge. Operational Skills refer to specific geriatric nursing techniques for fall prevention, dysphagia management and cognitive exercise. Humanistic Sentiment is shown in respect, empathy and patience for older people. Ethical Literacy refers to the ability to deal with difficult problems related to the rights of older people, informed consent and end-of-life decisions. The five factors are interconnected and promote each other's growth to foster all-around literacy among higher vocational nursing students in geriatric nursing.

3.2. Competency requirements for geriatric nursing positions

As the demands for services have risen, so too have the competency requirements for geriatric nurses; now they need to provide all-round support for older people's lives and health. Geriatric nursing staff should organize regular health check-ups for older adults in practice to find any problems early on and plan personalized nursing care. At the same time, older adults are more likely to have multiple diseases and take several medications; therefore, good knowledge of drug administration and awareness of cross-disciplinary cooperation are required. Good communication with older adult clients and their families is also considered one of the essential post-graduation competencies; this includes learning how older adults express themselves and reducing the stress of caregiving for family caregivers.

3.3. Particularities in cultivating professional literacy for higher vocational nursing students

First of all, there are specific reasons for this: most students are at the beginning of their professional identity formation stage and have little knowledge or are even prejudiced against geriatric nursing work; therefore, it is difficult to motivate them to learn internally. Another feature is that the length of study for higher vocational education is relatively short compared with the extended period required for literacy development. A main problem in teaching organization is how to combine knowledge transmission, skill cultivation and emotion cultivation within a short time frame. In addition, the actual training environment of higher vocational colleges does not fully align with real-life elderly care situations^[3]. Operating norms learned at school may not meet the actual demands of older adults' lives after graduation, thus causing a gap between training and practice.

4. Analysis on the current situation of geriatric nursing professional literacy among higher-vocational nursing students

4.1. Investigation and analysis of professional cognition and attitudes

Based on many studies, most high school seniors studying for the college entrance examination have little

interest in geriatric nursing. Many people believe that geriatric nursing is only about daily living and manual labor; they do not know the technical aspects and professional values of geriatric nursing. Therefore, these people are less likely to choose a job in old-age care. Most students do not have a positive attitude towards older people's lives; they believe that such lives are uninteresting, lack social recognition, and are too busy. A relatively small number of students wish to study for a degree in geriatric nursing. This negative attitude is due to a lack of geriatric nursing content in previous courses and no positive interactive experiences with older adults. Cognitive Intervention and Emotional Guidance are urgently required at the beginning of training to correct this problem.

4.2. Evaluation of knowledge and skill maturity

Higher-education nursing students do not have good mastery of special geriatric nursing knowledge and skills. Most can carry out basic nursing operations, such as measuring vital signs and hygiene care, but they are lacking in standardization and proficiency for specialized skills, such as all-round geriatric assessment, dementia care and swallowing function training. Students have a weak understanding of the characteristics of older people's drugs, unusual diseases and nutrition support measures; therefore, they perform poorly in the special geriatric nursing section of the theory test. Observations from clinical internships also show that students are unable to apply the knowledge they have learned to solve real-life problems in a hospital setting, and frequently fail to provide timely and accurate nursing assessments for elderly patients with multiple health issues.

4.3. Main existing problems and cause analysis

The main problems in the current professional literacy training for geriatric nursing among higher vocational nursing students are vague training goals, outdated and fragmented curriculum content, misalignment between practical classes and post-service demands, and formalistic cultivation of professional sentiment. Several reasons account for the above problems. There are no unified institutional curriculum standards and quality requirements for higher vocational geriatric nursing education; thus, colleges have designed their own training programs independently. In terms of resources, there is a shortage of teachers with geriatric nursing experience, insufficient investment in age-appropriate practical training facilities, and a high demand that cannot be met by high-quality internship opportunities at elderly care institutions. Socially, the low public image and poor remuneration of the elderly-care industry have partially offset the benefits of college education, making it difficult to maintain the training effect ^[4].

5. Construction of training pathways for geriatric nursing professional literacy

5.1. Pathway for curriculum system optimization

Optimization of the curriculum system will help nurture geriatric nursing professionals. First, it should be integrated with the existing curriculum of general nursing classes to create a new model for teaching geriatric nursing, rather than being taught as a separate course. Specific measures include adding more case studies on geriatric pathophysiology in pre-clinical courses, organizing special topics on geriatric ethics and geriatric psychology in Introduction to Nursing, and rearranging teaching content according to common geriatric health problems in clinical-nursing courses. In addition, all-encompassing scenario-oriented practical training courses focusing on elderly care should be developed to break through traditional disciplinary boundaries,

integrate training in assessment, communication, operational skills and health education, and build closer links between curriculum content and future post-service work.

5.2. Pathway to strengthening practical teaching

Application of knowledge in actual teaching helps students develop abilities for professional literacy. Its improvement should follow a gradual path: from simulation to actual operation, and from isolated modules to full-process workflows. At the on-campus practical training stage, high-fidelity geriatric nursing training centers should be established, equipped with age-adapted facilities and ageing-simulation devices, and multiple-scenario practice environments covering home-based, community-based and institutional care should be created so that students can repeatedly exercise special geriatric nursing skills in a safe environment. For clinical internships, there should be sufficient rotation time in geriatric wards, rehabilitation departments and elderly-care institutions, and preceptors need to offer regular guidance and feedback on the students' professional behavior. Another new way is to integrate volunteer work with professional practice by having students take part in community-based elderly health services regularly; thus, they will be exposed to the lives of older people over time.

5.3. Pathway for humanistic-literacy cultivation

The Foundation of Geriatric Nursing Professional Literacy is Humanistic Literacy. Cultivation should move away from traditional lecture-based teaching and achieve deep-seated assimilation through experience and reflection. Geriatric simulation teaching has shown good results; students experience physical discomfort and emotional changes due to ageing by simulating the physical restrictions of older adults and feel a strong sense of empathy. Narrative education is also worth promoting: students read geriatric literature, listen to the life stories of older adults, and write reflective care journals to develop a sense of purpose for geriatric nursing work through emotional connection. Campus culture and social practice are also excellent places for nurturing humanistic literacy. Organize activities with themes of respect for the elderly, geriatric nursing skill competitions and hospice care volunteer services to inspire students' sense of responsibility gradually ^[5].

5.4. Pathway for professional identity and emotional construction

Professional Identity serves as the internal motivation for the development of professional literacy. The extent to which higher-vocational nursing students feel emotionally connected to geriatric nursing work will affect their enthusiasm for learning and future employment. Currently, there is no emotional education in the training system, so many students have acquired knowledge and skills but lack an inner sense of purpose for elderly care careers. Therefore, we need to adjust our professional cognition. Orientation programs at the time of admission should present the trends of an ageing society and career prospects in geriatric nursing systematically to help students develop reasonable career ideals by fully grasping the professional significance of their studies. More significantly, continuous positive professional experiences can foster emotional recognition; students should be exposed to excellent role models in geriatric nursing practice and hear about their career development stories to feel the dignity and value of geriatric nursing work through real-life professional narratives. Institutional follow-up support for emotional construction is also required, such as establishing a professional mentor system to promptly address students' career-related confusion and help turn temporary emotional inspiration into long-term, stable professional commitment.

6. Safeguards for the implementation of training pathways

6.1. Safeguard for faculty team building

The faculty will organize the training paths. There is a serious lack of dual-qualified teachers who have both theoretical knowledge and practical experience in geriatric nursing; thus, the quality of training cannot be improved. Therefore, high-level vocational colleges should strategically hire geriatric nursing experts with strong industrial experience to strengthen the teaching staff. At the same time, encourage in-house teachers to enhance their professional literacy in geriatric nursing by participating in clinical further studies, academic exchanges and special training. Another relatively feasible way is to set up a joint employment model between colleges and institutions to invite experienced nursing managers and technical backbone staff from elderly care institutions to take on some practical teaching work and keep classroom content in line with frontline practice. All nursing teachers need to learn about changes in society's ageing process and incorporate geriatric nursing ideas across all courses during their own learning and development.

6.2. Safeguards for collaborative education among colleges and institutions

Collaborative education among colleges and institutions can meet the demand for new-generation talents after graduation. High-quality vocational colleges need to establish stable and deep partnerships with medical and elderly-care institutions to take part in all stages of talent cultivation. Under this cooperation model, colleges and institutions will jointly develop talent-training courses, co-create curriculum materials and practical-training projects based on post-graduate work requirements, and ensure that the training goals align with those of the post-graduate program. The dual-preceptor system for clinical teaching serves as a necessary tool for cooperative education; college teachers and institutional preceptors take turns leading theoretical instruction and practical demonstrations, and regularly organize teaching seminars to coordinate training progress. In-depth cooperation models include order-oriented training and modern apprenticeship pilots, which embed professional literacy learning in real-world professional settings.

6.3. Safeguard for quality evaluation and continuous improvement

The purpose of quality assessment is to determine whether the training path has achieved its goals and needs to be optimized. Build a multi-faceted evaluation system for all stages of training and balance the assessment of knowledge-skill acquisition with emotional-attitudinal changes. Evaluators should not be restricted to college teachers; they can also include clinical preceptors, older adults and their families, students themselves, etc., to cover all aspects of students' professional literacy development. For the type of assessment, move away from a single final examination and use process-oriented evaluation instead. Clinical journals, case studies, scenario simulations, 360-degree evaluations, etc., can all be used to observe changes in students' cognition, skills and emotions over time. Based on the results of the evaluation, colleges should promptly address the weak links in the training program and establish a closed-loop system of evaluation, feedback and improvement to ensure that the training path can adapt to changes in elderly care practice continuously.

7. Conclusion

Based on professional literacy training for geriatric nursing among higher vocational nursing students, this study has built a relatively complete theoretical system and practical plan through concept definition,

structural analysis, current situation diagnosis, pathway construction and safeguard design. Based on the above research, geriatric nursing professional literacy is multi-dimensional and contextual. Cultivation refers to the cultivation of people's moral qualities and abilities, and it is not just about imparting knowledge and skills. Higher-vocational colleges need to address the structural contradictions in the current training system, take curriculum optimization as the foundation, strengthen practical training support, and promote humanistic cultivation at the same time. Several paths can be used to achieve joint effects via faculty development and institutional safeguards. It is understood that the proposed framework will require testing and adjustment in actual school-running circumstances. Different regions and types of higher education institutions should adapt to their own resource conditions and regional elderly care needs, and thus transform the theoretical framework into practical results effectively.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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