Effective Clinical Instructor-A Step Toward Excellence in Clinical Teaching

Girija K.M
Lecturer, College of Nursing Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman

Abstract

The challenge of clinical teaching is to transform novice nursing students to practicing nurses. The teaching–learning interaction is complex and its effectiveness depend upon the teaching and learning styles of the instructor and student. Clinical instructors with model professional behaviors facilitate clinical learning. A pivotal factor for student success is the teacher’s interpersonal and instructional abilities. Student satisfaction with clinical teaching reflects not only strength of clinical teachers but also the positive aspects of clinical education. Clinical teaching excellence could be achieved by having effective clinical instructor characteristics such as professional competence, expert knowledge, demonstrable clinical competence with skills in clinical teaching, positive interpersonal relationships with students that portray confidence, respect, support and accessibility, with effective communicative and collaborative skills. As multicultural faculties are involved in clinical instructions, being aware of effective clinical instructor characteristics that are perceived as important by nursing students, teaching strategies and attitudes can be reinforced, changed, or developed towards excellence in clinical teaching. Being effective clinical Instructor, nursing students can feel clinical learning as an enjoyable experience.

Key Words
Clinical Teaching, Effective Clinical Instructor, Clinical Teaching Excellence

Introduction

Clinical education is challenging experiences for most students because it allows them to participate actively in the health care team, seeks solutions to real problems and learns by doing while caring for patients. The three distinguishing positive characteristics of clinical education are Problem-centered approach, experienced base learning model and Combination of individual and team learning. The clinical teachers’ breadth of knowledge with appreciable clinical skills and their ability to present content as clear and well organized, interacting skillfully with students, being enthusiastic, providing good clinical supervision and exhibiting model professional behaviors were accepted as effective clinical instructor characteristics towards excellence in clinical teaching.

Clinical Teacher effectiveness is more difficult to evaluate in diverse, often fast paced, highly complex clinical settings than in more controlled environments such as seminars, laboratories and classrooms. Current procedures used to evaluate teaching in health related fields are generally student-based. Evidence suggests that student ratings can be reliable and valid indicators of effective teaching. Despite the need for effective clinical education, the criteria for determining effective clinical teaching remains poorly defined. Clearly, there is urgent and compelling need to gain better understanding of what constitutes effective clinical teaching. This article is an over view of the effective clinical instructor characteristics towards the excellence in clinical teaching. The three key roles of clinical teachers are
1. Being a role model
2. Clinical supervisor
3. Instructional leader/scholar.

Role Modeling

Role modeling is a powerful teaching technique. Faculty should serve as role models and mentors to students. The role modeling process should be purposeful that demonstrate the knowledge, skills, attitudes and ethical behaviors that students should acquire. Role modeling requires demonstration of clinical competence and discusses the criteria by which the outcome was achieved, so the learner will more effectively imitate the behavior. The ability to establish clinical credibility has profound impact on the overall instructional influence of the teacher. Clinical Nurse educators as members of the academic community, are presumed to be governed by institutional policies and become role models of professional behavior for their students.

Clinical Supervision

Clinical supervision ensures safe patient care and excellent clinical learning. Clinical supervisory skills demand structuring the work and learning environment. Problem solving and critical appraisal of skills, observing and offering feedback on students performance and providing professional support and encouragement are part and parcel of clinical supervision. Environmental factors such as ideal clinical student–teacher ratio of 6:1 mostly agreed by students, contusive clinical environment, acceptance by clinical staff and also the peer group they stay together for clinical placement are influential factors for effective clinical supervision ensuring quality clinical teaching and learning. Efficient clinical supervisor is systematic, objective, creative and able to motivate students to utilize the available clinical recourses to the best towards achievement of effective clinical learning.

Instructional Leadership

Three components of Instructional leadership are curriculum development, the evaluation with improvement of teaching and educational research. Curriculum development should promote excellence in clinical education through organization of clerkship, specification of learning objectives, identification of reasonable educational recourses and clearly defined evaluation procedures. Systematic evaluation and improvement of clinical teaching is essential. Creation of new knowledge through investigation of issues of clinical
teaching-learning and innovative clinical teaching methods by collaborative research do exert a powerful influence on design and implementation of effective clinical teaching. A well planned educational program combined with motivated dynamic proficient faculty can create the best positive clinical teaching-learning environment for students.

**Effective Clinical Instructor Characteristics**

The nurse educators are in a unique position to assess cognitive, emotional, and learning strengths and weaknesses of student. The instructor must provide the student with individualized learning opportunities to perform safe patient care. The effective nurse educator must demonstrate good interpersonal skills, clinical competency, professionalism, and an understanding of the principles of adult learning. Nurse educators need to apply ethical behaviors in order to encourage a positive student-instructor relationship and to create a safe and nurturing environment. A better understanding of how students view the ethical behavior of their instructors may help not only in the understanding of their behaviors, but also in awareness of the importance of acting as role models to their students. It makes good sense to be proactive rather than reactive in terms of reviewing, developing, adapting, and implementing ethical guidelines for clinical practice.

Most studies which explored effective clinical instructor characteristics revealed that, students agree that the best clinical teachers are with sound interpersonal skills, able to provide constructive feedback, clinically competent, and know how to teach. Interpersonal relationships was the most highly valued effective clinical educators’ characteristic perceived by both Australian students and clinical educators. Faculty strength as being knowledgeable, strategic teacher, creating positive learning environment, demonstrating professionalism, displaying scholarly traits and being supportive with demonstrable clinical competence, skills in clinical teaching are reported by undergraduate and graduate nursing students in a descriptive, retrospective qualitative study on strength and weakness of faculty teaching performance in La Salle University School of Nursing USA by Zane et al, (2004).

Viverais-Dresler and Kutschke reported that nursing students emphasized the importance of clinical instructor being accessible, impartial, direct, honest, and being with a profile of fostered mutual respect. Claudette, (2006) explored student's perception of effective clinical teaching at Thompson Rivers University, British Colombia and found that students are remarkably consistent and rated teacher's knowledge, feedback and communication skills as the most important effective clinical teaching qualities. Teacher’s knowledge on clinical setting, curriculum, the learner and teaching/learning theory are considered very critical and important for being an effective clinical teacher.

A survey on students' perception of effective clinical instructor characteristics among nursing students at College of Nursing at Sultan Qaboos University revealed that clinical instructors’ professional competence and relationship with students were considered as important dimensions. All students identified “clinical instructor's role modeling behavior, evaluating students objectively and providing timely, constructive feedback” as the most important and effective professional characteristics of the clinical instructor. Providing freedom for discussion, being approachable, supportive and helpful in the clinical settings were rated as important clinical instructor characteristics under the category of relationship with students. Study results highlighted that all students wished to be respected as an individual by each clinical instructor.

Excellence in clinical teaching could be achieved by inculcating effective clinical instructor characteristic perceived important by nursing students. Three main dimensions of effective clinical instructor characteristics are professional competence, relationship with students and personal attributes of the Instructor. Professional competence includes knowledge and clinical skills, teaching ability, evaluation process, accessibility, communicative and collaborative ability.

1. **Professional Competence/Nursing Competence**

   **a. Knowledge/Skills**
   - Demonstrate knowledge of nursing in the area of instruction
   - Show clinical skill competence
   - Able to co-relate theory to practice
   - Able to transfer knowledge and skills to students for safe practice
   - Know the learner individually
   - Facilitate critical thinking in clinical practice
   - Role modeling-Demonstrate skills, attitudes, values that are to be developed in students in clinical area

2. **Accessibility**
   - Available to students in the area of clinical Instruction
   - Have designated office and clinical hours

3. **Evaluation Procedures**
   - Provide study guides/ outlines
   - Evaluate students objectively and fairly
   - Provide individualized timely feedback
   - Provide constructive and specific feedback
   - Gives tests that reflect course objectives, lecture materials, and study guides.

4. **Communicative and Interpersonal Skills**
   - Communicate effectively; breaks down content in a down-to-earth manner
   - Inform students about goals, expectations, desired outcomes, deadlines.
   - Interact with students
   - Able to collaborate with other disciplines
   - Receptive to people and ideas
   - Open minded, objective, non-judgmental

II. **Relationship with students**

   - Respect student as an individuals
Encourage students to feel free to ask questions or help
Permit freedom for discussion
Permit expression of feeling
Be supportive and helpful
Encouraging demeanor
Friendly attitude
Mentoring approach

III. Personality Traits / Personal Attribute

- Approachable
- Be honest and direct with students
- Demonstrate self-control & patience
- Show enthusiasm in nursing and teaching
- Be flexible when the occasion calls for it
- Respond promptly and confidently
- Exhibit responsibility and autonomy
- Be energetic and eager to know
- Have sense of humor
- Be organized and dedicated
- Be respectful and self-confident
- Be creative and well-prepared.

Implications

Clinical instructor must be aware of what characteristics of nursing instructors do learners consider ideal or most helpful to their success as nursing students. The review of expected effective characteristics of clinical instructors may assist faculty to appreciate and acknowledge areas of success as well as areas needing improvement. It also aid future nursing teachers and administrators to promote optimal clinical learning experiences for all types of nursing students. Academic administrators can optimally orient new clinical faculty to effective clinical teaching behavior and guide faculty development process. The expected effective clinical instructor characteristics could be useful as educational tool to assist faculty in providing effective clinical instruction. Nursing administrators may consider discussion about student rights, responsibilities and ethical faculty behavior, especially for new faculty. Academic administrators can act quickly when students complain about faculty members and approach the fact finding sessions with a continuous quality improvement perspective.

Conclusion

Being knowledgeable, strategic teacher, creating positive learning environment, demonstrating professionalism, displaying scholarly traits and being supportive with demonstrable clinical competence, skills in clinical teaching are always appreciated as great qualities of good clinical instructors. Clinical teacher’s feedback and communication skills are also emphasized by students. Important Clinical Instructor characteristics are categorized into three dimensions such as professional competence with teaching ability, interpersonal relationship with students and personal attribute of the instructor. Faculty awareness of students’ views on their teaching performance triggers their creativity and can bring the improved quality teaching with better outcome. Clinical competence of the instructors is important as instructors want to be considered as good role models for their students as well as their credibility as good teachers. Feedback from students on their perception of effective clinical teaching criteria can always open up clinical instructor’s creativity.

References
4. Zane RW, Pamela JB, Janice MB, Diane MW, Kathleen O. Strengths and Weaknesses of Faculty Teaching Performance Reported by Undergraduate and Graduate Nursing Students: A Descriptive Study. Journal of Professional Nursing. (2004); 20 (2) :118-128