

Student Nurses run the Show¹

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Abstract

The author describes his experience with a Student Nurse-led Ward Education Project developed by a German team of nurses at Elisabeth Hospital and Wannsee Training School for Nursing in Berlin in December 2001 after two years of preparation. The project idea was that a group of student nurses in the last part of their training should run a general medicine ward for 4 weeks under supervision. For this the nursing staff of the project ward completed a one week pedagogical training. Student nurses were to widen their clinical competence and prepare themselves for the final examination whilst the nursing team were to reflect on their way of care and develop pedagogical skills. In advance, different potential problems and scenarios were discussed and policies decided upon to provide opportunities for the students to gain experience whilst ensuring a high level of safety for the patients.

Introduction

As a Clinical Nurse Teacher it is challenging to bridge the divide between theory and practice and instruct student nurses effectively in a real-life situation. As an employee at a German Nursing School I need the support both of the hospital where I work and the Training School. Certainly a highlight in the work of a Clinical Nurse Teacher is to set up educational projects at a hospital. Unfortunately many projects never progress beyond the planning stage.

The project idea of a Student Nurse-led Ward was that a group of student nurses in the last part of their training should run a 27 bed general medicine ward of the Elisabeth-Hospital in Berlin for 4 weeks under supervision of a group of instructors. Not only should the student nurses develop themselves but also the nursing staff should profit from the project (see boxes 1 and 2).

Project goals for the student nurses

- To widen the clinical competence
- Preparation for the final examination (practical component)
- Preparation for the daily routine on a ward
- Development of independence and responsibility
- Development of communicational and co-operative skills
- Training of team nursing and nursing process
- Creation of a shift roster
- View into the duties of a ward sister

Box 1

¹ In November 2002 a similar German Version of this Article was published in the German Nursing Journal "DIE SCHWESTER, DER PFLEGER" of the BIBLIOMED Publishing Company with the Title "An einem Strang ziehen".

Project goals for the nursing staff

- Reflection and revision of the current care (service/quality)
- Training of pedagogical skills
- To get to know the educational goals of the nursing school
- Improvement of nursing quality
- Strengthening of a positive atmosphere in the team
- Stabilise the connection to the training school
- Reevaluation of the job as a mentor for student nurses

Box 2

The plan was to enable the nursing staff of the ward to instruct the student nurses based on the educational goals of the nursing school. That was to assure the fulfilment of the project goals and the safety of the patients. In addition the project was to be supervised by members of the nursing school. Would it be possible to inspire enough people to implement this educational project in times of budgeted care and medicine ?

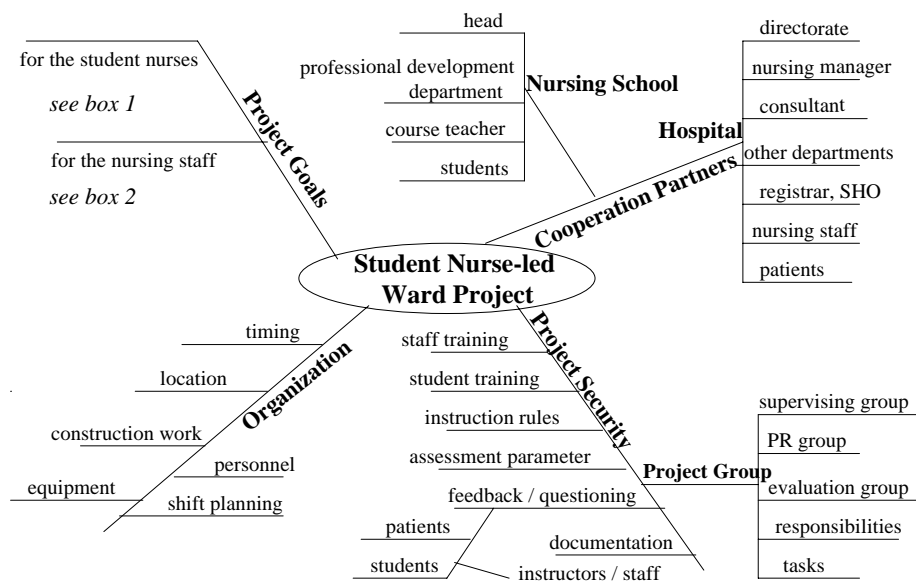
Frame and conditions

German student nurses have to complete a three year training both in theory and practice to become a registered nurse. Unlike to their colleagues in the UK they are either employed by a hospital or a nursing school and start their placements in acute hospitals straight after an induction program of a few weeks in the first semester.

The **Wannsee-Schule e.V.** is a German training school for health professions in Berlin and is united with 10 hospitals. The school has its 220 training posts in the Nursing School Department. The training school appoints clinical nurse teachers in the hospitals.

The **Elisabeth-Hospital** is a small A&E hospital in the heart of Berlin. It is a training hospital for student nurses from the Wannsee Nursing School.

Box 3



Preparation phase

The project group

Often new hospital-based education projects are launched by the Management Department. In this case it was different. The nucleus of the Student Nurse-led Ward Project were members of the nursing team. In autumn 1999 a project group was founded together with the Clinical Nurse Teacher of the Nursing School. Initially the project group had to convince the Nursing School, the Head and Trust of the Hospital and especially the Consultant of the General Medicine Department about the value of the project. After preparation of a strategy plan (see box 3) the Head of the Nursing School, the Nursing Director and the Course Teacher became members of the project group. The group met monthly to coordinate the process.

The ward

Even though the time of preparation took about 2 years and in the meantime there had been some personnel changes in the nursing team the motivation to run the project was constant. Some members of the team did preparatory work in their leisure time. Other hospitals were contacted which had similar projects. This exchange of experience was always valuable and inspiring. The members of the nursing staff reflected their way of care and because of that they created different working aids to improve the care. For example they produced a manual to help nurses to formulate nursing plans and an assessment form for student nurses. The fact that a third of the staff were former students of the Wannsee Nursing School made it easier to train the whole staff in the nursing standards of the school. In the preparation phase the future instructors also discussed potential problems and scenarios (see box 4) to increase their flexibility during the Student Nurse-led Ward Project.

Potential problems and scenarios during the Student Nurse-led Ward Project

- **Too much instruction/ advice/ control**
 - > students do not work independently
 - > students feel like they are in an examination situation
 - > stressful situation
- **Too little instruction**
 - > students cannot develop their skills
 - > endangering of patients
 - > students with poor performance cannot improve their skills
 - > project goals will not be reached
 - > trial and error
- **Endangering of patients**
 - > hygienic mistakes
 - > overexertion of patients
 - > care mistakes
- **high level of sick students**
- **high level of sick instructors**
- **instructors are impatient**
- **students work too slowly (work overtime)**
- **conflicts between students**
- **too few patients on the ward**
- **conflicts between students and instructors**
- **students prefer functional nursing**

- students feel overstretched
- instructors feel overstretched
- lack of continuous learning process (high change of shifts)
- instructors can't detect students with poor performance (high change of shifts)
- cooperational difficulties with other occupational groups (e.g. physicians)
- high consumption of nursing care products
- losing the overview of the project
- fall into functional nursing pattern
- time consuming handover
- contradictory information/advice of different instructors

Box 4

The Hospital

There has been no project like this before in the Elisabeth-Hospital. Every department was informed about the educational project by letter and innumerable conversations to increase the co-operation. The staff of the A & E Department were advised to inform and motivate patients before admission to the Student Nurse-led Ward. Therefore every patient should get an information sheet about the project. Naturally the admission to the project ward was voluntary. In the preparation phase there was extensive construction work in the area of the project ward. For a long time nobody knew how long this would take exactly and which rooms would be available eg. for handover in a big group. However the logistical assistance of the Manager of the Safety Estates Department was excellent. The Ward Manager had to supplement work materials to enable 15 student nurses to work in team nursing. In the school summer holidays 2001 the Nursing Director was able to send the complete nursing staff of the project ward to a one-week pedagogical training.

The training school

Also the School of Nursing had various preparation tasks in connection with the project. All placement plans of the students who were involved had to be revised and the work of two teachers, who were exempted from normal duties for a period of four weeks, had to be distributed amongst the school staff. To support the project a special training for the students was planned. Essentially it was two sessions organised by the staff of the ward and the ward doctor. In Session One the student nurses received an overview about the course of the day on the ward, the nursing documentation system, the shift roster and the predominant clinical pictures. In Session Two the students visited the project ward. The Professional Development Department of the Nursing School took on the pedagogical training of the nursing staff who would act as instructors.

The Student Nurses

The students were not informed about the project before the middle of their training because of its pilot character. Initially they reacted both with positive anticipation and doubt. This was to be expected because none of the teachers or nurses had experience of such a project and the challenge seemed daunting. In addition the project would shorten the last practical phase of their training on the examination ward by about four weeks. The students only became convinced that they would profit from the project when it was actually put into action.

Project Description, Progress and Results

There were 11 registered nurses involved in the project. The ward's permanent nursing staff continued to work to full capacity but this time in a supervisory role. Therefore it was possible to have 4 instructors supervising the early shifts on weekdays. The late shifts were supervised by 2 instructors and the night shifts by one. The 15 nursing students of the Wannsee Nursing School were divided into shifts as follows: early 7, late 3 and night shift 1. Because of the placement on the ward of 2 additional nursing students, one in the 1.semester and one in the 6.semester, there was a slightly higher number of staff after the first project week. The students worked in 3 groups in the early shifts according to the patient situation in team nursing or one to one care. In the late shifts the students first tried to implement team nursing but soon changed to functional care. As the intention of the project was to enable as much self-organisation of the student group as possible the instructors did not intervene in this aspect.

Before the start of the project the ward had produced a care plan for every patient. During the project the students carried out a weekly nursing round accompanied by the supervisors and the Senior Nurse responsible for nursing standards in the hospital. The nursing standards both of the hospital and of the Nursing School were in force, the latter being relevant to the students' final examination.

It was encouraging that all of the admitted patients agreed to take part in the project. The responses on the feedback forms given to the patients on the day of dismissal were generally positive. As the observers from the Nursing School stated the learning results for the students were mainly good in relation to the project goals. Obviously there were some situations which one could use even better for educational purposes in the project as well as normal starting difficulties. During the project the hospital offered short training sessions to the student nurses to support their capacity to act (see box 5). Different lecturers such as the Consultant, the Safety Instructor, the Clinical Nurse Teacher and Nurse Specialists were involved with this program. The students attended the teaching sessions two times a week between the early and the late shift. Every session took 15 minutes.

Subjects of the Training Sessions during the project	
Diarrhoea	Fire protection training
How to use the inhaler	Use of an Insuline-PEN
MRSA-management	Care of a corpse
Emergency equipment	Catheter infection
Emergency on a ward	

Box 5

In the project the learning situations were influenced both by the number of patients and the number of student nurses in a shift. The opportunity to learn was less if the relation of patients to the number of students was low. An additional task for the students was to instruct a 1.semester student nurse. Four student nurses got the chance to lead the

ward as a ward sister, each for a week. All students carried out their new roles as mentors and team leaders successfully.

Every day the instructor team used a mood assessment barometer where the students had to point to their current individual feeling about the project anonymously to gain an insight into the current mood of the group. Instructors and observers from the Nursing School had a daily meeting to discuss current questions and problems. In addition the instructors had a brief assessment meeting with their group of students on the end of every shift. They also documented the learning progress. Every Friday there was an additional meeting between the instructors and students.

The members of the nursing team carried out their new work as instructors with a lot of patience and understanding. In particular the instructors had to provide opportunities for the students to gain experience whilst ensuring a high level of safety for the patients. After a short period of adjustment all instructors were able to stay calm and to tolerate short delays resulting from the student's lack of routine over the course of the day. Every project week they could reduce their intervention.

There was no negative incident during the project. Every week the student nurses had to integrate the round of the Consultant, the nursing round, the visit of the Social Worker and their training sessions in the course of the early shift. The cooperation between project ward and other departments of the hospital was satisfactory. Also the cooperation between students, instructors and ward doctors was characterized of mutual esteem. This was especially the impression during the weekly meetings. All involved were highly motivated and took their role and tasks seriously as defined by the project goals.

Conclusion

Although there is still no evidence about whether the Student Nurse-led Ward Project has had a significant result in relation to the state examination and whether it has led to long-term development amongst the nursing staff of the project ward the organizers are willing to continue with the project. This is the result of the positive feedback of all involved especially the students, the staff of the ward and the patients. The Student Nurse-led Ward Project enabled the organizers from the Elisabeth-Hospital to provide successful training for junior employees, whilst encouraging them to consider future employment opportunities at the hospital. In addition the project encouraged informal reassessment of care quality and staff development for experienced nurses within the hospital. Since the project there has been a greater awareness of the role of nursing education in the hospital.

For the student nurses of the Wannsee-Schule e.V. the project is an additional stimulating learning module to improve practical nursing skills. Currently the school is planning its third Student Nurse-led Ward Project. It is hoped that other hospitals will be encouraged to create similar educational projects.