

VIEWS OF NEWLY-QUALIFIED CLINICIANS REGARDING THEIR TRAINING IN CONTINENCE CARE: RESULTS OF AN ON-LINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Hypothesis / aims of study

A recent survey of programme leaders in UK Higher Education Institutions regarding undergraduate continence education in nursing, medicine, midwifery, physiotherapy and occupational therapy reported that 14% had no continence content. Of those reporting some, 60% reported it was 6 hours or less¹. Our aim was to determine if professionals who graduated from such programmes within the last 18 months reported similar levels of continence education during their undergraduate training, and to determine if they felt it was sufficient to provide them with the knowledge and understanding to assess, treat and refer appropriately, those patients with continence problems in their clinical area.

Study design, materials and methods

During 2011 an on-line survey was developed, piloted and disseminated through medical deaneries, nursing and health provider forums. The survey included questions on the respondent's age, sex, year of graduating, present position and current exposure to patients with continence problems. Questions on education included asking if they had received any education about caring for incontinent patients, if this education was a specific module or inclusive/integral part of several modules, the approximate number of hours of practical and theory-based education and their resulting confidence when interacting with patients who have continence problems. They were also asked if they had received any continence education since qualifying and, on a visual analogue scale (VAS), if they felt such patients in their workplace were appropriately managed. It was also possible for respondents to add additional comments at 2 of the questions.

Results

507 surveys were started and 430 were completed. All respondents had been qualified for 18 months or less. Respondents were most common in the >35 year age group (33%). 82% were female and 76% were based in England. 37% had been working for less than 6 months in their present position, 45% had been working between 13 and 18 months in their present position. 90% of respondents reported that 25% of their patients had continence problems. Overall 59% had received some continence education in their under-graduate programme, 70% reported less than 5 hours classroom-based education and 60% less than 5 hours practical sessions over their entire programme. 44% reported that they felt there was enough coverage of practical and theoretical continence issues in their undergraduate program to prepare them for their clinical role. 48% rated their confidence when interacting with patients regarding their continence issues at more than 5 on a VAS where 0 was not confident. 84% had received no training in continence since qualifying. Results by profession are shown in Table 1.

Profession	Number of respondents	Some continence education	Clinical education was adequate	Theory was adequate	No continence education since graduating
All	507	59%	42%	43%	83%
Nursing adult	128	78%	43%	22.7%	73%
mental health	36	36%	12.5%	26%	86%
learning disabilities	9	44%	50%	33%	100%
children	10	54%	40%	40%	89%
Medicine	128	65%	50%	62%	93%
Physiotherapy	33	58%	22%	15%	92%
Occupational Therapy	20	25%	25%	13%	46%
Midwifery	74	34%	44%	45%	88%

Table 1

Interpretation of results

40% of those who had recently been students within UK programmes reported that they had received no continence education, with 60% reporting 5 hours or less of clinical and theoretical continence education. These findings would seem to support the lack of emphasis on continence education highlighted in the survey of HEIs, in which 14% of programmes reported no

continence education and those that had continence reported an average of 6 hours or less. Analysis by individual professions also substantiated the findings of the earlier survey e.g. adult nursing are the most likely health care profession to receive some training in continence. The findings of our survey are more extreme to those reported in a cross-sectional survey of 1000 qualified nurses, undertaken by the Nursing Times in 2009,² which reported that one-third had received no education about caring for incontinent patients during their undergraduate nursing programme, and 53% reported having no continence training after registration. There is no evidence that dedicated time is allocated to this topic or that standards have been developed, despite recommendations from the International Continence Society Educational Committee.³

Conclusion

Despite repeated claims of poor continence care within the NHS it would appear that staff are not graduating with sufficient knowledge to give them confidence in assessing or treating patients with continence problems. Furthermore there appears to be little provision of specialist training once qualified. Whilst recognising that education alone will not change behaviour, adequate basic continence education delivered at undergraduate level, directed by the General Medical Council, Royal Colleges and Health Professional Council would provide a springboard to improve the general ethos and delivery of care in this important quality of life area.

References

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Disclosures

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