Don’t rock the boat: Nursing student stories of conformity and compliance

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• Ineffective interprofessional communication (70% of sentinel events) - http://ipeforqum.com.au

• Clinical reasoning (57% of clinical errors) - http://www.newcastle.edu.au/project/clinical-reasoning/

• Conformity and compliance – impact on practice (and on people) inestimable
“I should have said no … ”
Nearly a century ago Florence Nightingale described the qualities of a “good nurse” as “restraint, discipline and obedience”.

“The nurse should carry out orders in a suitably humble and deferential way. She should obey to the letter the requirements of the matron and the sister” (Nightingale cited by Baly, 2001).

Nurses were socialised to obedience, respect for authority and loyalty to the team.

Nurses were acculturated to do and say what was expected, to conform rather than to question, to accept rather than debate important issues.

To what extent has the nursing profession outgrown this outdated image?
Aim of the Study

• To measure and compare the degree to which nursing students from three different universities experienced belongingness; and

• To explore students’ perceptions of the factors that impact upon and are consequences of belongingness.
• **Quantitative phase of the study**: 362 students completed an online anonymous questionnaire called the ‘Belongingness Scale – Clinical Placement Experience’. The data were analysed using SPSS.

• **Qualitative phase of the study**: 18 students participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews. The data were thematically analysed.

• This presentation will present selected findings from the qualitative phase.
Third year nursing students were recruited from two Australian universities, one in New South Wales and one in Queensland; and one university in the south of England.
A deeply personal and contextually mediated experience that evolves in response to the degree to which an individual feels:

- secure, accepted, included, valued and respected by a defined group
- connected with or integral to the group
- that their professional and/or personal values are in harmony with those of the group.

The experience of belongingness may evolve passively in response to the actions of the group to which one aspires to belong and/or actively through the actions initiated by the individual.

(Levett-Jones, 2008)
The experiences and perspectives of the participants from each of the three sites were remarkably similar in many respects.

Participants described placement experiences that spanned a continuum from those that promoted a high degree of belongingness to those that provoked intense feelings of alienation.

Students’ sense of belonging was influenced by a range of individual, interpersonal, contextual and organisational factors.

Interpersonal relationships forged with registered nurses exerted the single most important influence on students’ sense of belonging.
There was a strong relationship between belongingness and:

- Students’ self-concept, confidence, resilience and self-efficacy;
- Future career decisions;
- Students’ capacity and motivation to learn; and

- The extent to which students were willing to question or conform to poor practice.
• In order to avoid exclusion or rejection by the nurses they work with students sometimes obey, comply, work harder and generally attempt to present themselves in a favourable light.

• When students feel unwelcome, unwanted, alienated and unsure of their place in the clinical environment they are more willing to conform and less likely to question poor practice.

• Conformity and compliance are viewed by many students as strategies that can enhance their chance of inclusion and allow them to be seen as a member of the team or an ‘insider’.
‘Don’t rock the boat’
I’ve been in situations where patient safety was compromised, but who am I to criticise. I don’t say anything because I don’t want to rock the boat. You think, I want to fit in here and I don’t want people to hate me—that’s the thing.
I’ve seen patients left in pain lying in wet beds for hours. But I have never questioned it ... I’m not qualified, so I don’t feel I could say anything... and I couldn’t risk getting the nurses offside.
Contextual factors that moderate the extent to which students conform and comply ...

• Clinical environments where students feel ‘safe’ to ask questions and to question practice.

• Clinical leadership
I would definitely say something if I saw poor practice but it is feeling secure with the nursing staff that makes a world of difference to whether or not you speak up.
On the first day the manager said that if I had any problems I would be more than welcome to stick my head into the office and discuss them with her. She said, “We want students to feel comfortable and to ask questions while they’re here”. She said it in front of the other nurses too … very clearly stated.
• Are nursing students still socialised to obedience and conformity?
• If so, what are the implications for the nursing profession and the patients for whom we care?
• What could / should we do to create an environment in which students feel at liberty to question practice and ask questions?
• Is this issue related to only students?
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/question_time/9458918.stm
Toni Hoffman: Whistleblower

- Member of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday 2007 Honours List - for service to nursing and to the community through concern for the well-being of patients in the public health care system, and advocacy roles to improve standards of medical care.

- Toni was also named Australia's "Local Hero' for 2006, for her efforts in raising concerns about patient safety at Bundaberg Base Hospital during 2003-2005.

- Toni completed a Master of Bioethics in 2003.

Employment prospects?
Can education make a difference?

Nursing students – speaking out ...
The aim of contemporary nursing education is the development of questioning, innovative and assertive practitioners ... or is this just rhetoric?

Conformity and compliance are inimical to innovation and improvement.

In this study conformity and compliance were perceived by a number of students to be strategies that enhanced the degree to which they were accepted by nursing staff.
Books

Journal papers