

Transition to specialty practice programs in emergency nursing

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Background

Transition to Specialty Practice Programs (TSPPs) have been defined as a “formal program of education and clinical support designed to facilitate the transition” of nurses to a specialty unit (Boyle et al., 2008, p.194). TSPPs have been introduced nationally and internationally since the late 90s, to improve recruitment, preparation and retention of emergency nurses. TSPPs have developed in a ‘home grown’ manner, and as a result there is variability in the characteristics and duration of these programs.

Aims

The aim of this study was to examine the breadth and scope of TSPPs in Australian emergency departments (EDs), and to identify a framework for the future development of ED TSPPs.

Methods

An explanatory sequential design was used to examine the breadth, function, and structure of TSPPs in Australian EDs. Data was collected by survey (n = 118 EDs) and interview (n = 13) of Nurse Unit Managers and Nurse Educators.

Results

TSPPs were offered in more than half of the EDs sampled (n = 78, 66.1%). The median duration for TSPPs was 12 months (IQR 5-12 months). Most TSPPs offered clinical preparation including orientation days, study days, supernumerary and clinical support shifts (Mdn = 18 days, IQR 9-27 days). TSPPs which were 6 months duration had better professional development outcomes.

Nurse Unit Managers and Nurse Educators reported that TSPPs increased nursing recruitment, reduced nursing turnover, and improved professional development. TSPPs played an integral role in succession planning and skill mix.

Conclusion

While the aims of TSPPs were similar, there was variability in the structure and features of TSPPs in Australian EDs, and subsequently in TSPP outcomes. The identification of a national framework to support TSPP development should provide consistency and quality in the delivery of ED TSPPs and preparation of novice ED nurses.

References

Boyle, M., Butcher, R., Conyers, V., Kendrick, T., MacNamara, M., & Lang, S. (2008). Transition to intensive care nursing: Establishing a starting point. *Australian Critical Care*, 21, 190-199.