

Newly graduated nurses' competencies

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Changes in the educational system, also in nursing education, higher and higher expectations for nurses' professional competence create a need for systematic assessment of nursing students' professional competencies. Today's nursing education cannot stop at narrow preparation for the future profession, but must create the necessary conditions for the students to acquire general key competencies. Nursing competencies have been agreed upon in Europe and these are the basis for organizing studies in all higher educational institutions providing nursing education. A good universal measuring system for assessing competencies as an ability to apply acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes, does not exist. A person can assess, first and foremost, themselves their ability to apply competencies in a work situation. Whereas different studies show that when nursing students graduate from a higher educational system, the future nurses do not possess enough critical awareness of the amount of responsibility that working as a nurse entails and their independent work duties, due to which they overestimate their ability and readiness to work independently (Kelly and Ahern 2009, Romyn et al. 2009, Wolff et al. 2010, Feng and Tsai 2012). Thus, it is expedient to combine different methods when assessing competencies.

The aim of the research study was to describe competencies of nursing students in their last year at school based on students' self-evaluation and their supervisors' evaluations.

Methods: The sample was formed as a universal one from the last year nursing students (n=86) in an Estonian higher educational institution and a convenience sample of supervisors (n=23) of the students who had just graduated. The *Nurse Competence Scale* compiled by Meretoja et al. (2004) and adapted into Estonian by Freimann (2012) was used for the purpose of collecting data. Participating students filled in a written questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the supervisors.

In general, students as well as their supervisors/managers at their work places evaluate the students' competence as good. Students' own evaluation resulted in the average score of 6.6 on a scale of 10 for all competencies. Competencies required for helping a patient directly scored higher than average. The graduating nurses evaluated their readiness to apply competencies involving evaluating nursing quality and performance, developing the nursing profession, also applying research to improve nursing care, as below average. Supervisors evaluated newly graduated nurses' readiness to apply competencies connected to development and leadership as very poor. Taking into account the fact that 85% among last year students worked in hospital, it is somewhat surprising that a statistically important relation between work experience and the level of competencies appeared only in the evaluation of a few competencies. At the same time, there were competencies in which work experience was related to a lower score of the competency compared to a student's self-evaluation who did not have any work experience.

Freimann, J. (2012). Nurses' self-assessment of their competence in Tartu University Hospital. Master thesis in Nursing. Tartu University

Meretoja, R., Isoaho, H., Leino-Kilpi, H. (2004). Nurse Competence Scale: development and psychometric testing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 47, 124–133.